



Daily Report

Wednesday, 13 May 2020

This report shows written answers and statements provided on 13 May 2020 and the information is correct at the time of publication (06:42 P.M., 13 May 2020). For the latest information on written questions and answers, ministerial corrections, and written statements, please visit: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers/>

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Notes:

Questions marked thus [R] indicate that a relevant interest has been declared.

Questions with identification numbers of **900000 or greater** indicate that the question was originally tabled as an oral question and has since been unstarred.

ANSWERS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

■ Biofuels: Environment Protection

Alex Sobemal:

[\[43156\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment his Department has made of the environmental effect of subsidies to (a) Drax Power Station in Selby and (b) other bio-fuel companies that burn trees.

Kwasi Kwarteng:

The UK only supports biomass which complies with strict sustainability criteria,. These criteria take into account of social, economic and environmental issues including protecting biodiversity, land use rights, sustainable harvesting and regeneration rates. They ensure that the carbon stock of the forest from which the pellets are derived is not decreased by requiring that biomass fuels are derived from forest waste wood and residues and that the forest owner adheres to relevant legal requirements to protect biodiversity and the environment.

Current regulations[1] also, over time, increase the stringency of the ceilings and thresholds for the greenhouse gas emissions from producing the feedstock.

Sustainable bioenergy is helping us move to a low-carbon energy mix, increase our energy security and keep costs down for consumers. However, as we decarbonise, it is right to continually review our approach to ensure that we are using the lowest carbon sources of electricity. We have pledged that this will be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we inherited it.

We are reviewing the air quality impacts of biomass to ensure that our energy policies can jointly tackle climate change and improve air quality. We are currently consulting on proposals to remove coal to biomass conversions from the Contract for Difference scheme. In addition, all support for coal-to-biomass conversions will end in 2027.

[1] The Renewables Obligation Order 2015 in England and Wales, The Renewables Obligation (Scotland) Amendment Order, the Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 and the Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme and Domestic Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme (Amendment) Regulations 2015 as amended

■ Personal Care Services: Coronavirus

Alberto Costa:

[\[41515\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of enabling mobile hairdressers to work during the covid-19 outbreak.

Paul Scully:

In order to reduce social contact, the Government has ordered non-essential businesses to close, this includes hairdressers and barbers. The nature of the industry involves close contact and it would not be possible for hairdressers to adhere to social distancing measures.

These remain closed, because the risk of transmission in these environments is higher due to the indoor environment and closer physical contact.

On 11th May we published our COVID-19 recovery strategy, which sets out a roadmap to a phased recovery. Over the coming months, Government will introduce a range of adjustments to current social distancing controls, timing these carefully according to both the current spread of the virus and the Government's ability to ensure safety. Each step may involve adding new adjustments to the existing restrictions or taking some adjustments further.

The ambition to reopen hairdressers is part of Step 3 of the roadmap and we will work with the sector to develop safe ways for them to open at the earliest point at which it is safe to do so.

We continue to work with stakeholders on developing sensible guidance for businesses that will give UK workers the utmost confidence on their return to work. We will now focus on sectors that are not currently open to help them plan for when they can open.

■ Restaurants: Disease Control**Preet Kaur Gill:****[43118]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what assessment he has made of the level of adherence to social distancing guidance in takeaway restaurant kitchens.

Paul Scully:

The Government has introduced important social distancing measures for all types of businesses to consider in order to minimise the risk of transmission in the workplace. The Government has been clear that it is vital that all employers follow this guidance, which is clinically led and based on expert advice.

The advice on social distancing measures applies to everyone. This includes all staff in a takeaway business, including those working in the kitchen, and in any external public areas where customers may need to queue to collect orders. In order to support employers, we have provided additional guidance about how these measures might be implemented in different sectors: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance>

We have produced specific guidance, which applies to any food preparation or food service setting where food is sold directly to the consumer. For example, bars, pubs and restaurants operating as takeaways, cafes, food to go, food delivery and traditional takeaway (fixed and mobile); and contract catering at the point of service to

the consumer such as in office or similar environments. It specifically refers to the requirement of businesses in the food industry to maintain social distancing in kitchens and other food preparation areas.

We have outlined a number of measures, which we expect employers to consider in order to reduce contact in kitchens. These include:

- Following government guidance on managing food preparation and food service areas ([gov.uk/workingsafely](https://www.gov.uk/workingsafely)).
- Allowing kitchen access to as few people as possible.
- Minimising interaction between kitchen workers and other workers, including when on breaks.
- Putting teams into shifts to restrict the number of employees interacting with each other.
- Spacing workstations 2 metres apart as much as possible, recognising the difficulty of moving equipment such as sinks, hobs and ovens. Consider cleanable panels to separate workstations in larger kitchens.
- Providing floor marking to signal distances of 2 metres apart.
- Using 'one way' traffic flows to minimise contact.
- Minimising access to walk-in pantries, fridges and freezers, for example with only one person being able to access these areas at one point in time.
- Minimising contact at 'handover' points with other staff, such as when presenting food to serving staff and delivery drivers.

If a business is not operating in line with the Government guidance, there is a role for the relevant health and safety enforcing authority - the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) or Local Authority. Where the enforcing authority identifies employers who are not taking action to comply with the relevant public health legislation and guidance to control public health risks, for example, employers not taking appropriate action to socially distance, the enforcing authority will consider taking a range of actions to improve control of workplace risks. These actions include the provision of specific advice to employers through to issuing enforcement notices to help secure improvements with the guidance.

■ Small Businesses: Non-domestic Rates

Richard Burgon:

[43075]

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, what estimate his Department has made of the value of Small Business rate relief that businesses in (a) Leeds, (b) Yorkshire and the Humber and (c) the UK have been unable to access as a result of being ineligible to apply for that funding as a result of paying business rates as part of their rent or through serviced office costs.

Paul Scully:

Government has made £12.3 billion available to businesses under the Small Business Grants Fund and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grants Fund. The schemes have been tied to the business rates system to provide a framework for local authorities to make payments to businesses as quickly as possible as these businesses are likely to face particularly high fixed costs, such as fixed rents.

As of 3 May, over 697,000 businesses in England have received grants under the two schemes, totalling £8.6bn. We do not hold data on the value of Small Business rate relief of businesses that are not eligible for this grant funding. We have, however, published a full breakdown of grant funding allocated to and distributed by each local authority here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-grant-funding-localauthority-payments-to-small-and-medium-businesses>.

On 1 May, the Business Secretary announced a further up to £617 million available to local authorities to support small businesses previously outside the scope of the business grant funding, such as businesses in shared offices and regular market traders who do not have their own business rates assessment. For more details, please see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/top-up-to-local-business-grant-funds-scheme>.

■ STEM Subjects: Higher Education**Chi Onwurah:****[42026]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy what guidance his Department has issued to (a) funding bodies and (b) universities in relation to STEM PhD students that are no longer able to complete lab based work.

Amanda Solloway:

The Government is aware of the impact of COVID-19 on the ability of STEM PhD students to complete lab-based work.

I have written an open letter, encouraging the sector – where possible and fully in line with government advice – to continue with science- and research-related business. This sets out that universities and research institutes will be best-placed to make decisions themselves about what should be paused or stopped. The letter has been published on the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) website: <https://www.ukri.org/files/news/science-minister-letter-covid19/>.

UKRI is continuing to engage with the higher education sector, and confirmed on 9 April that it will offer a costed extension of up to six months for UKRI PhD students due to complete by 31 March 2021 whose study has been impacted by the pandemic.

Attachments:

1. Letter from Science Minister 23.03.20 [PQ 42026 Science Minister letter COVID19 (1).pdf]

■ Temporary Accommodation: Fees and Charges

Scott Benton:

[\[43187\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, whether he plans to take steps to support small hotels and bed and breakfasts by temporarily suspending fees for (a) motion picture, (b) television and (c) music licences during the covid-19 outbreak.

Amanda Solloway:

The Government does not have the power to suspend fees for motion picture and music copyright licences. This is because copyright licensing is a private, commercial matter between the parties concerned in which the Government is not involved.

However, certain licensing bodies, including some for film and music, have introduced voluntary measures to help mitigate the financial impacts of the outbreak on their licensees. These measures include waiving licence fees when businesses are closed, deferring payments, and the suspension of late payment charges.

The Government currently has no plans to suspend television licence fee payments.

My Rt. Hon. Friend Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer has already announced a host of measures to help small businesses in this period, including the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS), business rate relief, and VAT deferrals. However, the licence fee is an important area of interest, and of course we will keep this matter under review.

DEFENCE

■ Animal Experiments: Porton Down

Kenny MacAskil:

[\[43760\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether any projects involving the use of live animals in scientific procedures at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, Porton Down, were part of contracts with foreign Governments in the latest period for which figures are available; and what the value of those contracts was.

Jeremy Quin:

There were a number of projects that have involved the use of live animals in scientific procedures at Dstl that were part of contracts with foreign governments. The total value of those contracts in the latest period (Financial year 2019-20) was £2.4 million.

Kenny MacAskil:

[\[43761\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of removing females of a litter of triplets from the breeding programme of marmosets at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, Porton Down and re-homing them to decrease the number of those animals that are euthanised.

Jeremy Quin:

The welfare of marmosets in the Dstl breeding programme is under constant review by veterinary staff, independent inspectors and the Dstl Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body.

In captivity, triplet marmoset litters are more frequent and some marmoset families are not able to rear triplets successfully. Optimal family group welfare is maintained where appropriate by euthanasia of some infants to reduce litter size. It would not be appropriate to re-home newly born triplet female marmoset infants away from their families as their physical and psychological welfare needs could not be met in these circumstances.

Defence: Procurement**Mr Kevan Jones:**[\[42923\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the total amount of foreign exchange rate losses attached to MOD defence programmes was in the last financial year.

Jeremy Quin:

As has been longstanding policy under successive Governments the Ministry of Defence buys forward foreign exchange using forward purchase contracts agreed with the Bank of England. The impact of this is that foreign exchange movements are smoothed over time.

Taking the last financial year in isolation, the volatility in exchange rates resulted in an increase of circa £200 million, this is part of normal Departmental business to manage.

Terrorism: Mozambique**Mark Pritchard:**[\[43854\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what support he is providing to the Government of Mozambique to tackle jihadists in north eastern Mozambique.

James Heappey:

Through the British High Commission in Maputo, the UK is in regular contact with the Government of Mozambique and has discussed support in tackling the growing terrorist insurgency in North East Mozambique; centred on the Cabo Delgado region. The problem requires a cross Government response, including tackling the underlying issues which foster the conditions of such an insurgency. Whilst some Defence activity has been paused during the current Covid19 movement restrictions, we anticipate increasing our engagements once restrictions are lifted, facilitated by a defence cooperation Memorandum of Understanding that was signed in May 2019.

■ Veterans UK: Remote Working

Anthony Mangnall:

[44038]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what (a) systems and (b) processes are required to be introduced to ensure that Veterans UK is able provide its full portfolio of benefit services while staff are working from home.

Johnny Mercer:

Officials have been working together with the Trades Union to ensure there is a safe system of work in place to enable as many staff as possible who are unable to work remotely to safely return to the office. Protocols have been agreed and staff that need to be in the workplace are returning to work. These protocols are in accordance with Government guidelines.

Over the next three years, Veterans UK is undergoing a £30 million transformation and modernisation programme to digitise its pension and compensation schemes and to drive innovation and modernisation, including the development of self-serve systems for claimants. This transformation will enable staff to access the required information and work remotely without the need for hard copy files.

■ Veterans: Pensions

Anthony Mangnall:

[44039]

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what support his Department provides to veterans that are waiting for pension decisions during the covid-19 outbreak.

Johnny Mercer:

The Veterans UK website has been recently updated to make it easier and clearer for claimants to seek the help and assistance they require. Welfare Managers continue to provide advice, information and support to their respective client groups, in response to contact and referrals, utilising telephone calls, emails and Skype. Face-to-face visits are organised only where it is absolutely necessary to do so. Welfare Managers are proactively keeping in touch with known vulnerable veterans to offer support and reassurance and are working closely with local and national business partners in the 3rd sector and statutory providers of services, to ensure those in need of additional support are linked into services that they may require.

Where terminally ill veterans or those suffering particular hardship are identified, Veterans UK has in place a small team which is able to safely access the office to take action on urgent cases where the case evidence needed to do so is available.

In addition, the Veterans' Gateway, a 24-hour point of contact for veterans' support, launched a new app enabling any ex-Service personnel in need of support to get help using a smartphone or tablet. The new app, funded by the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund, helps veterans find organisations within their local area to help with issues such as finances, housing, employment, relationship, physical and mental health. The directory, which is intuitive and easy to use, groups

all NHS facilities across the country, and over 2,000 charitable organisations, allowing veterans and their families to access local support quickly and easily.

■ War Widows: Pensions

Julian Sturdy: [\[45160\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what alternative methods to reinstating war widow's pensions for war widows who remarried between 1973 and 2005 his Department is assessing to mitigate the effect on those widows of changes to that pension.

Johnny Mercer:

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 24 March 2020 to Question 30112 to the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Ms Crawley)

Attachments:

1. 30112 - War Widows Pensions [Hansard Extract 24 March 2020 UIN 30112.docx]

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

■ Charities: Coronavirus

Munira Wilson: [\[43175\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if his Department will publish the criteria being used for charities to receive part of the £360 million direct from Government Departments within the Government's £750 million charity funding package.

Mr John Whittingdale:

Government departments submitted applications based on their assessment of needs in their relevant sectors. Funding decisions reflect an assessment of the urgency and scale of the need in line with the national response to Covid-19. Departments will follow their own internal processes to distribute grant money directly to charities in the coming weeks.

This funding has been allocated to Government departments in accordance with urgent priorities in their relevant sectors, including up to £200m for the Department of Health and Social Care for hospices. Relevant departments are working to distribute grant money to charities at pace in the coming weeks.

■ Gambling: Video Games

Mhairi Black: [\[41511\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what guidance the Government has provided to people (a) financially affected by and (b) addicted to loot boxes in video games.

Caroline Dinenage:

The government takes concerns around issues such as loot boxes in video games very seriously. We have committed to a review of the Gambling Act, with a particular focus on tackling issues around loot boxes. Further details will be set out in the

government response to the DCMS Select Committee's report on Immersive and Addictive Technologies which will be published shortly.

We also continue to work with industry and the age ratings bodies to encourage the use of parental controls that can disable or limit spending on devices, and welcomed the launch in January 2020 of the games industry's Get Smart About P.L.A.Y. campaign encouraging parents to use parental controls and take an active role in their children's gaming. We also welcome PEGI's decision in April 2020 to introduce a new 'paid random items' content label for physical and digital copies of games.

■ Internet: Safety

Chi Onwurah:

[\[40600\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what methodology was used to estimate the number of companies affected by the proposals in the Online Harms White Paper.

Caroline Dinéage:

The estimate of the number of companies that will be in scope of the Online Harms framework is based on a sample of data from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR). The IDBR is a comprehensive list of UK businesses used by the government for statistical purposes.

The sample was designed to ensure that it was sufficiently large and had sufficient representation of organisations of different sizes in order for the results to be robust. For each organisation in the sample, we reviewed whether it offers activities that may fall within the scope of the regulation, and on that basis do not believe that more than 5% of UK businesses will be in scope. We are continuing to work to ensure that new regulation will be proportionate and risk-based.

■ Newspaper Press: Coronavirus

Darren Jones:

[\[43131\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if he will meet representatives of the (a) Independent Community News Network and (b) Public Interest News Foundation to discuss (i) allocating a proportion of the Government's Coronavirus advertising spend to independent-sector newspapers and (ii) disbursing that funding and placing those advertisements under a sector-wide agreement with that network and foundation.

Mr John Whittingdale:

The Minister for Media and Data met with the Independent Community News Network and the Public Interest News Foundation on 6 May to discuss Government support for the independent news publishing sector to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 on the sector. This meeting included a discussion about the Government's national campaign to provide information and reassurance to the public about Covid-19 and how the independent sector may be used to reach underserved audiences.

All titles utilised in the campaign have been selected by the Government's media planning and buying agency, OmniGOV. As with any media planning approach, titles are selected on their ability to engage with audiences at a national, regional and local level and to ensure value for money, reach and targeting efficacy. The current partnership brings together over 600 national, regional and local titles across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to reach 49 million people a month. The vast majority of titles are local papers and additional titles have been selected in order to further reach priority audiences including BAME and older men.

■ Radio: Finance

Daisy Cooper: [\[42193\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps his Department has taken to ensure that Arqiva provides commercial radio broadcasters with equitable financial support to tackle high fixed transmission costs during the economic downturn.

Daisy Cooper: [\[42194\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, if his Department will publish the criteria used in negotiations with Arqiva to determine the level of financial support for transmission fees allocated to commercial radio broadcasters during the economic downturn.

Mr John Whittingdale:

We have discussed with Arqiva a possible package financial support for commercial radio broadcasters in relation to transmission fees. Discussions are continuing with Arqiva and we hope discussions will conclude shortly. Our priority, in raising these issues directly with Arqiva, is to ensure that the interests of small commercial radio stations are reflected in any agreements.

■ Science: Coronavirus

Darren Jones: [\[43130\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Media, Culture and Sport, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of the UK Association for Science and Discovery Centres' proposal for an Emergency Resilience Fund for science centres during the covid-19 outbreak.

Caroline Dinenage:

Science and discovery centres around the country have an important role in educating and entertaining visitors of all ages on what science is and the important discoveries over the centuries that have changed all our lives.

The proposal for an Emergency Resilience Fund sets out the difficulties that science centres are facing while they are closed and unable to earn income from visitors.

Science centres in England have access to the unprecedented support the Government has announced for business and workers, to protect them against the

current economic emergency. This includes the Job Retention Scheme, which I am pleased science centres have benefited from, VAT payment deferrals, and £330bn worth of government backed and guaranteed loans to support businesses. The Chancellor has also announced a Bounce Back loan scheme to help small businesses access loans of up to £50,000, with a 100% government-backed guarantee for lenders.

Many science and discovery centres are also part of museum groups or are heritage sites, such as members Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre, the Discovery Museum in Newcastle, part of Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, and Thinktank, the Birmingham Science Museum. Museums and heritage organisations can access over £200 million of coronavirus support schemes from Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Science centres outside England may be eligible for further support from the devolved governments.

Our immediate national priority is containing the spread of the virus. As soon as it is safe to do so, we will be encouraging people to visit leisure attractions once again. On 11th May 2020 the Government published a roadmap setting out how we expect organisations such as science and discovery centres to open back up and welcome visitors again.

■ **Young People: Coronavirus**

Chris Elmore:

[\[43092\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what plans he is putting in place to keep young people safe online during the covid-19 outbreak.

Caroline Dinenage:

The internet presents many benefits during this period. It can help young people stay connected and access educational resources. However this period may place some young people at greater risk of experiencing harm online.

On 23rd April, DCMS published new online safety advice on how to stay safe online during the Covid-19 outbreak, with a particular focus on supporting parents and carers to protect children.

The Government is firmly committed to making the UK the safest place to be online, and we are working at pace to introduce Online Harms legislation.

EDUCATION

■ **Assessments: Coronavirus**

Daisy Cooper:

[\[43173\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the covid-19 outbreak, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of postponing the introduction of the reception baseline assessment in response to the disruption to early years learning.

Nick Gibb:

The Department understands the challenging circumstances schools and early years settings are facing and is working closely with our delivery partner, the National Foundation for Educational Research, to keep progress towards the reception baseline assessment under regular review.

■ Assessments: Finance**Daniel Zeichner:**[\[42077\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he has had discussions with exam boards on ensuring that autumn exams are held (a) at a financial loss to and (b) with other financial implications for exam boards in (i) geology, (ii) history of art and (iii) other subjects with a small cohort of students.

Nick Gibb:

We are discussing arrangements for the Autumn GCSE and A level exam series with the exam boards and with Ofqual, the independent qualifications regulator. Ofqual will set out further proposals for consultation as soon as possible.

■ Children: Coronavirus**Layla Moran:**[\[44029\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what reference to the oral evidence session of the Education Committee on 22 April 2020 on the Inquiry, the impact of covid-19 on education and children's services, how REACT teams are comprised with regard to (a) staff, (b) volunteers, (c) funding and (d) on the ground support.

Nick Gibb:

Regional Education and Children's Teams (REACTs) have been established to better co-ordinate how the Department and Ofsted capture information and intelligence about local needs and circumstances in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, whilst also offering support to local authorities where they need it.

There are nine REACTs across England, representing policy areas including vulnerable, children's social care, special educational needs and disabilities, schools and further education. Membership includes representatives from Ofsted and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Membership is drawn from existing Departmental and Ofsted staff, so does not require additional funding.

REACTs provide a mechanism for the Department to coordinate conversations with local authorities across education and children's services, preventing duplication. Through those conversations, REACTs discuss matching practical support offers to those local authority areas that require it. Specifically, Ofsted have to date agreed deployment of 242 staff to 114 local authorities, with 98 having started the deployment (as of 11 May 2020). The purpose of these placements is to assist frontline organisations deal with urgent activities related to COVID-19, or by back-filling roles that enable others to deal with urgent activities related to COVID-19, for example in contacting and tracking vulnerable children.

■ Education: Coronavirus

Neil Coyle:

[\[43036\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions his Department has had with internet providers about ensuring online access is free to education services during the covid-19 lockdown.

Nick Gibb:

4G wireless routers will be provided to help disadvantaged children with a social worker in secondary school, and care leavers and Year 10s to access the internet.

The Government has also announced that the UK's major telecoms companies have committed to supporting vulnerable consumers by removing data caps for broadband services and treating fairly those who find it difficult to pay their bill.

We are currently in discussions with the major telecommunication providers to explore how they can further help us to support families without internet access.

■ Free School Meals: Coronavirus

Sir David Evennett:

[\[42911\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many families with children that are eligible for free school meals have received vouchers under the national voucher scheme in (a) the London Borough of Bexley, (b) Greater London and (c) England during the covid-19 outbreak.

Sir David Evennett:

[\[42912\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, how many pupils are eligible for free school meals in (a) Bexleyheath and Crayford constituency and (b) the London Borough of Bexley.

Vicky Ford:

As both my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

During this period, we are asking schools to support children who are eligible for and claiming benefits-related free school meals, by providing meals or food parcels through their existing food providers wherever possible. However, we recognise that providing meals and food parcels is not a practicable option for all schools. That is why on 31 March we launched a national voucher scheme as an alternative option, with costs covered by the Department for Education.

Schools are best placed to make decisions about the most appropriate arrangements for eligible pupils, and this can include food parcel arrangements, alternative voucher arrangements or provision through the national voucher scheme.

Edenred has reported that over £70 million worth of voucher codes has been redeemed into supermarket eGift cards by schools and families through the national voucher scheme as of Tuesday 12 May. Edenred has also reported that over 16,500

schools had placed orders for the scheme as of Tuesday 28 April. We do not collect data on the scheme at pupil level.

The number and proportion of students who qualify for free school meals is published in the 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics' publication and its underlying data files. As of the 2019 school census, there are 2,833 primary school students in Bexley who were eligible for and claiming free school meals, 184 special school students, and 2,323 secondary school students. Statistics for the 2020 school census are not yet available. The 2019 publication is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2019>.

These are rapidly developing circumstances; we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

Dan Jarvis:

[43650]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of extending the national voucher scheme over future school holidays during the outbreak of covid-19 for pupils in receipt of free school meals.

Vicky Ford:

Provision for free school meals is ordinarily term time only. However, during the Easter holidays the department met the costs of offering free school meals to eligible pupils not attending school during term time weeks. This was in recognition of the unprecedented levels of disruption and uncertainty for schools during this time. We currently have no plans to extend the scheme into future holiday periods.

These are rapidly developing circumstances; we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly .

■ Free School Meals: Voucher Schemes

Daniel Zeichner:

[42067]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will take steps to ensure that the Edenred school voucher system includes the Co-op stores.

Vicky Ford:

As both my right hon. Friends, the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer, have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

The national voucher scheme for free school meals currently includes a variety of supermarkets. Initially, the scheme included supermarkets that already have e-gift card arrangements in place with our supplier, Edenred, including Asda, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Morrisons, Marks & Spencer and Waitrose. On Monday 27 April, we added Aldi to this list and on Wednesday 29 April, we added McColl's. We have been working with other supermarkets to encourage them to join. Any additional supermarkets would need to have the right infrastructure to deliver e-gift cards across their network of stores.

Schools are best placed to make decisions about the most appropriate free school meal arrangements for eligible pupils during this period. This can include food parcel arrangements, alternative voucher arrangements or provision through the national voucher scheme. Our guidance for schools sets out that they can be reimbursed for costs incurred where the national voucher scheme is not suitable for their families. This can include alternative voucher arrangements with supermarkets that are not part of the national voucher scheme.

Schools are best placed to make decisions about the most appropriate free school meal arrangements for eligible pupils during this period. This can include food parcel arrangements, alternative voucher arrangements or provision through the national voucher scheme. Our guidance for schools sets out that they can be reimbursed for costs incurred where the national voucher scheme is not suitable for their families. This can include alternative voucher arrangements with supermarkets that are not part of the national voucher scheme.

We have been working closely with the Co-op and welcome their efforts to support families across the country. We thank all supermarkets for their hard work during these challenging times.

These are rapidly developing circumstances. We continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

■ Higher Education: Coronavirus

Chi Onwurah:

[42028]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment his Department has made of the effect of the covid-19 lockdown on the dropout rate of low-income students from higher education programmes.

Michelle Donelan:

The government is clear that we do not want to see any students miss out on the opportunity to benefit from our excellent higher education (HE) system as a result of COVID-19. A package of stabilisation measures for the HE sector in England has been announced to boost support for students, stabilise the admissions system and ease pressures on universities' finances.

This will mean that students can complete their studies and obtain the qualifications they deserve, with as little further disruption as is possible.

HE providers are best placed to identify the needs of their student body, as well as how to develop the services needed to support it. HE providers need to consider how they support all students, particularly the most vulnerable, to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes. Many providers will have hardship funds to support students in times of need, including emergencies. The expectation is that where any student requires additional support, providers will support them through their own hardship funds. We also expect that HE providers will continue to support disadvantaged groups to participate in HE through the targets set out in their access and participation plans.

We have engaged closely with the Office for Students to enable providers to draw upon existing funding to increase hardship funds and support disadvantaged students impacted by COVID-19. As a result, providers will be able to use the funding, worth around £23 million per month for April and May, towards student hardship funds, including the purchase of IT equipment, and mental health support, as well as to support providers' access and participation plans.

Eligible students studying on full-time and part-time courses will continue to receive scheduled payments of loans towards their living costs for the remainder of the current 2019/20 academic year.

Students with a part-time employment contract should speak to their employer about the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/financial-support-for-businesses-during-coronavirus-covid-19>), which has been set up to help pay staff wages and keep people in employment.

■ Home Education: Standards

Andrew Selous:

[41922]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department makes of parents's competence in (a) reading, (b) writing and (c) mathematics in relation to home schooling; and if he will make a statement.

Nick Gibb:

The Department has made no such assessment. The Government does not expect parents to act as teachers or to provide the activities and feedback that a school or nursery would. Parents and carers should do their best to help children and support their education while dealing with other demands. We have issued information, guidance and support to parents and carers of children who are learning from home, which is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/supporting-your-childrens-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>.

■ Overseas Students

Rachael Maskell:

[41528]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate he has made of the number of international students planning to study in the UK from September 2020; and what plans he has to mitigate the effects on the higher education sector of any loss of income resulting from any reduction in the number of international students beginning courses in September.

Michelle Donelan:

The government recognises that the COVID-19 outbreak will have an unparalleled impact on all elements of the global and UK economy. The higher education (HE) sector, including student recruitment, is no exception. We have been working closely with the sector to monitor the likely impacts of COVID-19 on international student

numbers. We understand the COVID-19 outbreak and a possible reduction in the number of international students poses significant challenges.

In response to this and calls from the sector, on Monday 4 May, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, announced a package of measures to stabilise university admissions this autumn and ensure sustainability in HE at a time of unprecedented uncertainty.

Temporary student number controls will be put in place for domestic and EU students for academic year 2020/21, to ensure a fair, structured distribution of students across providers. These measures mean that providers will be able to recruit students up to a temporary set level, based on provider forecasts, which allows additional growth of up to 5% in the next academic year. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, will also have the discretion to allocate an additional 10,000 places on top of the controls, of which 5,000 will be allocated to students studying nursing or allied health courses, to ensure growing numbers that will support our vital public services. This measure will only apply to full-time, undergraduate, UK/EU domiciled students, with certain specified exemptions. These controls will not apply to international (non-EU) students.

The Office for Students (OfS), the regulator in England, will also consult on a new temporary condition of registration. The OfS's proposed condition would prohibit registered providers from engaging in any form of conduct which, in the opinion of the OfS, could reasonably have a material negative effect on the stability and/or integrity of the English HE sector.

The government has also: reprofiled tuition fee payments, expected to be worth £2.6 billion, for providers so that they receive more cash in the first term of academic year 2020/21; announced £100 million of public funding will be brought forward to the current academic year to help protect vital university research activities in England; and, confirmed providers are eligible to apply for the government financial support schemes estimated by the OfS to be worth at least £700 million to the sector.

Universities have an integral part to play in our economy, society and culture, which is highlighted now more than ever through their leading role in the fight against the virus. That is why we have introduced this package of measures to boost support for students, stabilise the admissions system and ease the pressures on universities' finances.

I wrote to all hon. Members with full details of the package, which have also been published on GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-support-package-for-universities-and-students>.

■ Schools: Coronavirus

Dan Jarvis:

[43932]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the effect of school closures during the covid-19 outbreak on the educational attainment of young carers; and what additional support his Department is providing to those young carers.

Vicky Ford:

The department will do whatever it can to make sure no child, whatever their background, falls behind as a result of COVID-19. We know that young carers may be particularly vulnerable during this time and are committed to ensuring that vulnerable children and young people remain protected and supported.

The government has published guidance for both schools and local authorities on how best to support families and protect vulnerable children during COVID-19. This is available on GOV.UK.

Educational settings remain open and safe for vulnerable children and young people. Our definition of vulnerable children and young people includes those who have been assessed as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (including children's social care services), and who are therefore in need of continued education provision - this can include children on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services, adopted children, or those who are young carers, and others at the provider and local authority discretion.

Local authority duties to assess the needs of young carers, under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, remain unchanged.

The government has committed over £100 million to boost remote education, including by providing devices and internet access to vulnerable children who need it most, including young carers who have social workers. Schools continue to receive additional funding through the pupil premium - worth around £2.4 billion annually - to help them support their disadvantaged pupils. We have also given local authorities over £3.2 billion of extra funding to help address the pressures faced in responding to the pandemic, including within children's social care.

We have also taken wide-ranging action to help schools and parents to support all young people during the school closures. This includes:

- publishing a list of online education resources and guidance for parents
- supporting the launch of a new online academy offering pupils 180 online lessons a week

Additionally, the BBC has created a package of TV and online materials to support learning at home.

The department is also considering, with a range of partner organisations, how best to support all pupils, especially those who are disadvantaged, to make up for time spent out of school.

The government will be publishing advice for young people with caring responsibilities, which will include information and guidance on how and where they can get help and support during this period.

■ Students: Fees and Charges

Lloyd Russell-Moyle:

[41568]

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, whether he plans to rebate students on their university fees for the period of the covid-19 lockdown.

Michelle Donelan:

The government continues to work with the higher education (HE) sector to make sure that all reasonable efforts are being made to enable students to continue their studies to the best of their abilities.

Universities offering high-quality tuition online will continue to charge fees. Fee loans are paid directly to higher education providers at the start of the third term. We are working closely with sector representative bodies to understand the impact of COVID-19 and the immediate financial implications for students and providers.

We only expect full tuition fees to be charged if online courses are of good quality, fit for purpose and help students progress towards their qualification. If universities want to charge full fees, they will have to ensure that the quality is there. The government has made it clear that, if providers are unable to deliver adequate online teaching, then it would be unacceptable for students to be charged for any additional terms, which would effectively mean that they were being charged twice.

The government is also working with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, professional bodies and the Office for Students (OfS), the higher education regulator in England, to ensure that students continue to leave university with qualifications of value. The OfS has published guidance for registered providers about how it will approach the regulation of quality and standards during the COVID-19 outbreak. This guidance is clear that standards must be maintained (further details are available at the following link):

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/guidance-for-providers-about-quality-and-standards-during-coronavirus-pandemic/>. Actions that providers are taking now may continue to be required in the 2020-21 academic year if there is prolonged disruption as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

It is important that students receive a good standard of education. Whether an individual student is entitled to a reduction of their fees will depend on specific contractual arrangements between the HE providers and the student.

If a student is concerned about their education, or about the steps that their provider has taken to respond to the situation, they should speak to their HE provider in the first instance. The government expects student complaints and appeals processes to be operated flexibly, accessibly, and sympathetically by institutions to resolve any concerns. Students who are not satisfied with their provider's final response can ask the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education to consider their complaint if their institution is based in England or Wales.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS**■ Dogs: Coronavirus****Robert Halfon:****[42989]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on re-opening dog grooming parlours to ensure the welfare of animals during the covid-19 outbreak.

Victoria Prentis:

The Government's message to the public is clear: stay alert, control the virus and save lives. Dog grooming businesses play a key role in ensuring the welfare of the nation's pets and have been allowed to operate since advice to businesses was first published, within the strict advice on social distancing and hygiene.

The Canine and Feline Sector Group, which advises both the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England and Defra Ministers, has issued its own guidance to pet businesses, including dog groomers, on how they can continue to operate under current restrictions and in line with guidance around social distancing and hygiene: www.cfsg.org.uk/coronavirus/SiteAssets/SitePages/Home/CFSG%20Animal%20Business%20Guidance%2007.04.20.pdf.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE**■ British Nationals Abroad: Coronavirus****Ruth Jones:****[43166]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent discussions he has had with the African Union on the repatriation of (a) British citizens and (b) UK residents overseas during the covid-19 pandemic.

James Duddridge:

The UK is grateful for the continued support of our international partners, including African Union member states. Our African partners have assisted us in flying our citizens home, including by keeping key transit hubs open to air traffic. FCO officials at diplomatic missions in African Union member states maintain close engagement with local authorities to support UK residents in these countries and to discuss issues related to the repatriation of British Nationals. On 21 April, I spoke with the Commissioner of Social Affairs at the African Union Commission. We discussed the African Union-UK collaborative response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the work of the Africa Centres for Disease Control (Africa CDC). We also have a Senior Public Health England Advisor seconded to Africa CDC, to whom I spoke in April, and I have also spoken to our Ambassador in Addis Ababa on multiple occasions over the last three months, most recently on 7 May.

■ India: Coronavirus

Rachel Reeves:

[\[43888\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what the timetable is for repatriating all UK citizens awaiting repatriation to the UK from India.

Nigel Adams:

[Holding answer 12 May 2020]: Our repatriation effort from India is a priority for the UK Government and is one of our largest COVID-19 repatriation operations, based on the number of British travellers there and the absence of commercial options. As of 12 May, more than 14,000 people have been repatriated from India on 60 flights. We are working around the clock to return more on daily flights from across India. We announced an additional five flights on 7 May, departing from Amritsar and Ahmedabad between 12-15 May. Our top priority is to help the most vulnerable British nationals return to the UK and we reserve as many seats as possible for these individuals on all flights. The addition of these upcoming flights is expected to return almost all of those who are eligible to fly from our waiting lists, and the small minority of those who are unable to travel are currently being looked after by our consular teams in India.

Stephen Kinnock:

[\[43945\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what plans his Department has to re-open the portal for UK travellers stranded in India wanting to register an interest in accessing UK Government special charter flights to return to the UK.

Nigel Adams:

[Holding answer 12 May 2020]: As of 10pm 12 May, more than 14,000 people have been repatriated from India on 60 flights. Between 12 and 15 May, an additional four flights are due to depart from Amritsar and one from Ahmedabad, servicing those locations with the highest numbers of British nationals remaining in the country. Seats on these flights are being allocated to British people who are on waiting lists. We are reserving as many seats as possible on the flights for vulnerable British nationals. Each registration portal has been open for a minimum of 5 days and widely promoted, allowing sufficient time for British nationals wishing to leave India as soon as possible to register their interest in a flight. After this phase of flights, we anticipate that the vast majority of British nationals remaining on the waiting list who can, and want to fly, will have returned to the UK. We are monitoring where there are British nationals still needing to return to the UK, and will reassess if there is need for further flights based on demand. Consular assistance is available for British nationals who remain in India and require support.

Colleen Fletcher:

[\[43951\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what his criteria are for scheduling additional special charter flights from India to the UK after 11 May 2020 as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Colleen Fletcher:

[\[43952\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, whether the special charter flights from India to the UK scheduled to end on 11 May 2020 will accommodate all UK residents wishing to return home.

Nigel Adams:

[Holding answer 12 May 2020]: Our repatriation effort from India is a priority for the UK Government and is one of our largest COVID-19 repatriation operations, based on the number of British travellers there and the absence of commercial options. As of 10 May, more than 14,000 people have been repatriated from India on 60 flights. We are working around the clock to return more people on daily flights from across India. Between 12 and 15 May, an additional five flights are due to depart from Amritsar and Ahmedabad, servicing those locations with the highest numbers of British nationals remaining in the country. There are currently no further flights planned, but we will keep this under review, based on demand.

Our top priority is to help the most vulnerable British nationals return to the UK and we reserve as many seats as possible for these individuals on all flights. The addition of these upcoming flights is expected to return almost all of those who are eligible to fly from our waiting lists, and the small minority of those who are unable to travel are currently being looked after by our consular teams in India.

While the focus has been on British nationals, we have also flown vulnerable people with Indefinite Leave to Remain back to the UK on Government charter flights whenever there has been capacity on the aircraft. We will continue to do so on any remaining flights.

■ Iraq: Kurds

Jack Lopresti:

[\[43626\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the strength of relations between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the federal government of Iraq.

James Cleverly:

The UK supports a strong Kurdistan Region within a strong and unified Iraq. We welcome the new Government of Iraq under Prime Minister Kadhimi and are encouraging the new Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government to co-operate closely in order to resolve all issues in accordance with the 2005 Iraqi Constitution. The UK will continue to engage with both sides in support of this endeavour.

■ Israeli Settlements

Rushanara Ali:

[\[42036\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 28 January 2020 to Question 5529, whether it remains the Government's

policy that Israeli annexation of parts of the occupied West Bank could not go unchallenged.

James Cleverly:

[Holding answer 6 May 2020]: It is UK policy that unilateral moves towards annexation of parts of the West Bank by Israel would be damaging to efforts to re-start peace negotiations and contrary to international law. Any changes to the status quo cannot be taken forward without an agreement negotiated by the parties themselves. We reiterated our deep concerns about annexation and restated our position on this issue at the UN Security Council remote meeting on the Middle East Peace Process on 23 April.

■ Repatriation: Coronavirus

Hywel Williams:

[\[40516\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to assist the repatriation of people on (a) spouse and (b) family visas during the covid-19 pandemic.

Nigel Adams:

[Holding answer 4 May 2020]: Our objective remains to bring home British national travellers who want to return to the UK, as soon as possible. British national travellers will therefore be prioritised for seats on HMG repatriation flights. We are seeking to help vulnerable non-British UK residents with indefinite leave to remain where possible. We will not split up families where any non-British spouses or dependents have the relevant entry clearance, are resident in the UK, and are travelling with a British family member. This goes beyond what we usually do, since our consular assistance is for UK nationals. However, recognising the exceptional challenge of Covid-19 and that many people who call the UK home want to get back, we are seeking to help vulnerable people with ILR wherever possible so long as they have lived in the UK within the last year.

■ Saudi Arabia: Security

Alyn Smith:

[\[42184\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, how many Overseas Security and Justice Assistance (OSJA) assessments were undertaken in respect of security, justice and policing support to Saudi Arabia in (a) 2018, (b) 2019 and (c) 2020; how many of those OSJA assessments were approved; and which Ministers approved each of those OSJA assessments.

James Cleverly:

[Holding answer 6 May 2020]: HMG currently has 10 Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessments (OSJAs) for ongoing security activity in Saudi Arabia. Collecting information on historic OSJAs across Government will take more time. OSJAs are owned by several departments. Due to the confidential nature of our cooperation we cannot share information beyond this. The Foreign and

Commonwealth Office in 2020 is not leading any programmes, and therefore has no OSJAs.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

■ Alcoholic Drinks: Misuse

Dr Dan Poulter: [\[42983\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the level of alcohol consumption during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

It is too early to make any assessment of the levels of alcohol use during the COVID-19 outbreak. The Department is working with Public Health England, NHS England and NHS Improvement and stakeholders to monitor indicators to track any behaviour change.

■ Alcoholic Drinks: Rehabilitation

Dr Dan Poulter: [\[42985\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment has he made of the availability of inpatient NHS alcohol detoxification beds in (a) the UK, (b) London and (c) Suffolk during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

This information is not held centrally.

■ Breastfeeding: Donors

Daisy Cooper: [\[37942\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to grant human milk bank workers key worker status to ensure milk collection and distribution is not affected during the covid-19 outbreak.

Daisy Cooper: [\[37943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will take steps to enable milk donors facing difficulties accessing GP and hospital-based phlebotomy services during the covid-19 outbreak to access donor clinics run by NHS Blood and Transfusion Services.

Jo Churchill:

The Government has granted key worker status to those working in critical sectors. Key workers in the health and social care sector include but are not limited to doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers, and other frontline health and social care staff including volunteers; the support and specialist staff required to maintain the United Kingdom's health and social care sector; and those working as part of the health and social care supply chain.

The Government is committed to supporting breastfeeding, as the health benefits are clear for mothers and their babies. The World Health Organization states that if a mother's own milk is not available then the next best thing is the milk of another woman.

According to the UK Association of Milk Banks website, there is a network of 15 human milk banks across the UK (13 in England, with one each in Northern Ireland and Scotland), which are operated by NHS hospitals and institutions. In order to ensure that milk collection and distribution continues safely during the COVID-19 outbreak, individual milk banks are implementing their own action plans to facilitate the safe clinical screening and recruitment of milk donors, accepting and transporting donor milk, and ensuring the health and wellbeing of volunteer drivers.

Anyone wishing to receive further information on these action plans, should seek advice from their local milk bank.

Daisy Cooper:

[37944]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will provide additional funding to scale up milk banks to help meet demand for donor milk during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

The Government is committed to supporting breastfeeding and human milk banking, as the health benefits are clear for mothers and their babies.

There are currently no plans to change the way in which milk banks are funded, which is via a combination of National Health Service funding and public donations.

However, in relation to meeting the ongoing demand for donor milk during the COVID-19 outbreak, local initiatives remain underway to maximise provision, for example, milk banks in Glasgow and Oxford piloting the use of a novel traffic light system so that the babies at most need are prioritised when milk stocks run low.

■ Cancer

Henry Smith:

[43623]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many two week urgent cancer referrals there were in (a) April 2019 (b) April 2020 for suspected (i) breast cancer, (ii) bowel cancer, (iii) lung cancer, (iv) blood cancer and (v) prostate cancer.

Jo Churchill:

The data on how many two week urgent cancer referrals there were in April 2019 and April 2020 for suspected breast cancer, bowel cancer, lung cancer, blood cancer and prostate cancer is not available in the format requested.

Data on urgent two week wait cancer referrals by suspected tumour group is collected and published by NHS England and available at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/cancer-waiting-times/>

Data for April 2020 will be published on 11 June 2020.

■ Cancer: Clinical Trials

Alex Norris: [38587]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the long-term effect on cancer research of the suspension and cancellation of clinical trials.

Helen Whately:

The Department's National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) is prioritising urgent research to support the COVID-19 emergency by operating a single, national process in which an expert panel reporting into the Department, and acting on behalf of the Chief Medical Officer, prioritises the COVID-19 studies which hold most potential for tackling the challenges we face. The process aims to establish national priorities for research, prevent duplication of effort, and ensure that the capacity of the health and care system to support research is not exceeded.

There has also been a need to enable the redeployment of research staff, and research support staff, to frontline care where necessary. These circumstances mean that there will be some unavoidable delays to cancer research. We are seeking to minimise such delays.

■ Cancer: Health Services

Alex Norris: [41153]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent assessment he has made of the level of demand for oncology services that are provided outside hospital settings.

Alex Norris: [41155]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of providing NHS oncology treatment in patients' homes during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

Published data does not yet cover the time period of the COVID-19 outbreak.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there may need to be some changes to how treatments are delivered. Cancer and its treatment can weaken the immune system, making a person more vulnerable to the virus.

Although urgent cancer diagnosis and treatment is continuing, in some cases, it may be safer to delay cancer treatment or give it in a different way, to reduce the risk of infection. For example, patients having chemotherapy may start to have it at home, to reduce visits to hospital while continuing with their treatment. Guidance to help support clinical decision-making at this time has been issued by NHS England and NHS Improvement at the following link:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/cancer/>

■ Cancer: Mental Health Services

Jim Shannon:

[\[43021\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what mental health support has been made available to people living with cancer, whose treatment has been interrupted as a result of covid-19.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

We recognise that social distancing and self-isolation are likely to increase the risk of loneliness and mental health issues, particularly for people with pre-existing health conditions, such as cancer, whose treatment has been interrupted, and those who are shielding.

To respond to this, the Department and Public Health England are working with the National Health Service, social care, voluntary sector and across Government to improve mental health support and provide guidance for those shielding, self-distancing and in self-isolation.

We are working with NHS England and NHS Improvement to ensure the mental health needs of those who are shielding are adequately met.

■ Cancer: Rother Valley

Alexander Stafford:

[\[40812\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to ensure people living in Rother Valley constituency receive their urgent referral cancer test results in two weeks.

Jo Churchill:

General practitioners across England are continuing to refer on to cancer pathways in line with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidance so that patients can be managed appropriately, and we are working with Cancer Alliances to ensure diagnostic services are available to carry out the necessary investigations.

■ Cancer: Screening

Alex Norris:

[\[40740\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether people who have already taken part in cancer screening and are required to have follow up tests are receiving those tests during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 4 May 2020]: National Health Service cancer screening services (breast, bowel, cervical) have been affected by a range of clinical and operational impacts during COVID-19, and some services at local level have rescheduled appointments and invitations as a result.

Services are now focused on restoring appointments for the highest priority patient populations first, including those already some way along the screening pathway.

This will be followed by a full reinstatement of other impacted parts of each screening programme pathway, including any further diagnosis and onward referral to treatment. NHS England and NHS Improvement have asked NHS public health commissioners and their providers to provide follow up tests for people who have had positive screening tests, where they have resources and facilities do so, and where it can be done safely for the public and staff.

■ Care Homes: Cleaning Services

Dr Julian Lewis:

[37374]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the value of the role of local commercial laundries in cleaning contaminated bedding and other substantial soiled items from care homes; whether the coloured water-soluble bags needed to process soiled items safely have been designated under the category of PPE for essential laundry staff; and if he will urgently allocate resources to manufacturers of water-soluble laundry bags to meet the shortfall of availability to local commercial laundries serving care homes arising from the increased use of such bags by hospitals serving NHS patients.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 27 April 2020]: The Government is not currently considering the wider use of local commercial laundries in regard to care homes. The Government has published guidance related to laundry in care homes which can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-residential-care-supported-living-and-home-care-guidance/covid-19-guidance-for-supported-living-provision>

Public Health England published a COVID-19 personal protective equipment (PPE) guide to those working in care homes on 17 April. This advises that suitable decontamination arrangements for some PPE items should be obtained from the manufacturer, supplier or local infection control. Public Health England's publication can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-how-to-work-safely-in-care-homes>

Water-soluble bags are not designated under PPE at this current time. A list of PPE recommendations for social care workers can be accessed at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>

■ Care Homes: Pay

Dan Jarvis:

[38578]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to increase pay for care workers in line with the national living wage.

Helen Whately:

The National Minimum Wage is the legal minimum employers must pay their workers. For workers aged 25 and over this legal minimum is defined as the National Living Wage. The current rate (2020) for the National Living Wage stands at £8.72. Central Government will continue to ensure that the social care system is funded so that providers can pay the National Living Wage to all eligible workers.

In addition, local authorities, as commissioners of adult social care were given market shaping duties by the Care Act 2014 and must work with care providers to determine a fair rate of pay for fair work based on local market conditions.

■ Carers: Protective Clothing**Daniel Zeichner:**[\[42068\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he is taking steps to mandate local authorities to provide protect equipment to (a) care workers employed by private companies that receive public money and (b) other care workers in (i) Cambridge and (ii) England.

Jo Churchill:

We are working around the clock to give the social care sector and wider National Health Service the equipment and support they need to tackle this outbreak. We published a personal protective equipment (PPE) Plan on 10 April, setting out clear guidance on who needs PPE and in what circumstances they need to use it; and how sufficient supplies will be secured and distributed to the front line.

■ Clinical Trials: LGBT People**Jamie Stone:**[\[43734\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of prohibiting gay and bisexual men from donating their plasma to a trial to provide treatment for covid-19.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 11 May 2020]: No individual is excluded from giving blood, platelets or plasma based on sexual orientation. However, all men must wait three months after having sexual contact with another man before donating. This is based on expert advice from the Advisory Committee on the Safety of Blood, Tissues and Organs.

The three-month deferral period is to reduce the risk of any very recently acquired infections not being detected on screening and further tests. For that reason, the current donor selection guidelines remain in place for the convalescent plasma donation programme.

The Equality Act 2010 states that blood services do not contravene anti-discrimination legislation by excluding people from donating blood as long as this exclusion or deferral is based on a reasonable and reliable assessment of risk to the public.

We recognise that people want to be considered as individuals as much as possible. Separately to the convalescent plasma trial, NHS Blood and Transplant are already working collaboratively with LGBT+ groups on blood donation, through the FAIR (For Assessment of Individualised Risk) steering group. The FAIR group is using an evidence-based approach to explore if a more individualised blood donation risk assessment can be safely and practically introduced, while ensuring the safe supply of blood to patients.

■ Coronavirus: Clinical Trials

Stephen Doughty:

[\[42046\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that the results of clinical trials from publicly funded research on covid-19 are (a) provided to the WHO primary clinical trial registry and (b) uploaded to clinicaltrials.gov.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 6 May 2020]: The United Kingdom Government is a signatory of the 2013 Helsinki declaration which states that research studies must be registered on an internationally recognised trial registry. The International Standard Randomised Controlled Trial Number Register (ISRCTN) is the internationally recognised registry of choice for primary research in the UK and feeds into the World Health Organization's own systems. Other internationally recognised registries may be appropriate or required for the primary registry; e.g. where there is a regulatory requirement.

■ Coronavirus: Computer Software

Daisy Cooper:

[\[43170\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what redress mechanisms for data subjects are in place in respect of the personal data collected by the new covid-19 tracing app being developed by NHSX.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 11 May 2020]: Identifiable data is not collected into the app, nevertheless we are applying the rights and obligations of the General Data Protection Regulation. The requirements of the United Kingdom's data protection legislation are administered and enforced independently of the Government by the Information Commissioner. If somebody has concerns about how their information has been used they should, in the first instance, contact the Data Protection Officer for the Department. If they remain unsatisfied, they can refer the matter to the Information Commissioner's Office.

■ Coronavirus: Death

Sir David Amess:

[37371]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many people who have died from covid-19 to date had underlying health problems.

Jo Churchill:

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) collates official statistics on deaths registered in England and Wales. An ONS report published on 16 April analysed deaths involving COVID-19 that occurred in the month of March and found that 91% of deaths involved some form of pre-existing condition. The most frequent pre-existing condition was ischaemic heart disease, involved in 14% of cases. Information can be found on their website at the following link:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/deathsinvolvingcovid19englandandwalesmarch2020>

Mr David Davis:

[41382]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if the Government will publish statistics on the risk of death posed by covid-19, by age group, after removing co-morbidities.

Mr David Davis:

[41383]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if the Government will publish statistics on the risk of death posed by covid-19, by ethnic group, after removing co-morbidities.

Mr David Davis:

[41384]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if the Government will publish statistics on the risk of death posed by covid-19, by gender, after removing co-morbidities.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 4 May 2020]: Government statistics on the risk of death posed by COVID-19, by age group, ethnic group and gender, after removing co-morbidities, are not currently published.

We have asked Public Health England to review COVID-19 outcomes among different groups to better understand how factors such as ethnicity, deprivation, age, gender and obesity could impact on how people are affected, and to explore underpinning reasons for disparities.

We are also supporting the National Institute for Health Research's call for rapid research proposals on COVID-19 and ethnicity.

■ Coronavirus: Disease Control**Afzal Khan:****[38637]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department took prior to the covid-19 outbreak to (a) prepare for and (b) mitigate the effect of a pandemic; and whether his Department is following a pandemic preparedness strategy for the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

Pandemic plans have been developed over a number of years, informed by lessons learned from the H1N1 (2009) pandemic and from the Ebola outbreak of 2013-2016. The Government has been proactive in implementing lessons learned from these incidents as well as from exercises conducted since then. This includes being ready with legislative proposals that could rapidly be tailored to what became the Coronavirus Act 2020, plans to strengthen excess death planning, planning for recruitment and deployment of retired staff and volunteers, and guidance for stakeholders and sectors across Government.

In addition, the Government's work to prepare for the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union improved the overall resilience of public services, giving the Government a better understanding of supply chains and ensuring the internal mechanisms of Government were better prepared to deal with the impacts of COVID-19.

Dr Julian Lewis:**[38861]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will urgently make it his policy to include people living with (a) pulmonary fibrosis and (b) the after-effects of polio in the list of people classified as vulnerable and at high risk during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 27 April 2020]: Expert doctors in England have identified specific medical conditions that, based on what we know about the virus so far, place someone at greatest risk of severe illness from COVID-19. These are signed off by the UK Senior Clinicians Group (including four United Kingdom Chief Medical Officers and clinical leadership at NHS England, NHS Digital, and Public Health England).

Individuals who have been identified with one of these medical conditions are classed as being clinically extremely vulnerable and are advised to shield to protect themselves. Shielding involves staying at home at all times and avoiding all face to face contact for a period of at least 12 weeks.

Pulmonary fibrosis is an interstitial lung disease. Patients with interstitial lung disease (which includes pulmonary fibrosis) have been identified as clinically extremely vulnerable.

■ Coronavirus: Ethnic Groups

Liz Saville Roberts:

[41556]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what discussions he has had with counterparts in the devolved Administrations on the reasons why covid-19 disproportionately affects people from BAME communities throughout the UK.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 4 May 2020]: Public Health England (PHE) has been asked by the Chief Medical Officer to review the potential that some ethnic minority groups are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. PHE is hosting a series of stakeholder events in the coming weeks, which will involve the devolved administrations and opportunities to collaborate and share learning will be part of the discussion.

Liz Saville Roberts:

[41558]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, when the decision to appoint Trevor Phillips to lead a review into the effect of covid-19 on BAME communities was made; and whether he will provide a list of all other individuals contributing to the review.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 4 May 2020]: Trevor Phillips is not leading or running the review. The review is being led by Public Health England (PHE). Mr Phillips and his company will be but one source of intelligence alongside the National Institute for Health Research research call and PHE's own surveillance expertise. Their input will be specific and time limited.

PHE is hosting a series of stakeholder events in the coming weeks and these discussions will include government and public health specialists from the devolved administrations, community and faith groups, voluntary sector leads, organisations that represent migrant populations, local government leaders and public health specialists, academics and researchers, Royal Colleges and other Government departments.

■ Coronavirus: Flags

Andrew Rosindell:

[42930]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he plans to implement an official NHS flag in recognition of health workers during the covid-19 outbreak.

Edward Argar:

There are currently no plans to implement a National Health Service flag but we are always looking for new ways to recognise the NHS and social care workforces. We are showing our appreciation by allowing use of the NHS identity in approved fundraising initiatives throughout the course of the pandemic, which ordinarily would not be permitted.

■ Coronavirus: Greater London**Gareth Thomas:****[39468]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to include (a) Harrow, (b) Barnet and (c) Brent in any future contact tracing pilot to tackle covid-19; and if he will make a statement.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

We are developing a new test and trace programme. This will bring together an app, expanded web and phone-based contact tracing, and swab testing for those with potential COVID-19 symptoms.

The first phase of the National Health Service COVID-19 app rollout is taking place on the Isle of Wight. This will ensure the app is functioning as expected and will help us to see how it works best alongside the existing web and phone-based systems and to ensure that it dovetails with the testing programme. National rollout is expected from mid-May. There are no specific plans for Harrow, Barnet and Brent.

■ Coronavirus: Medical Equipment**Tom Hunt:****[38641]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of equipping frontline NHS staff with general service respirators from military and civilian authority stocks during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

The United Kingdom Government and devolved administrations are committed to ensuring that those on the frontline in responding to COVID-19 are provided with the critical personal protective equipment (PPE) they need to do their job safely.

The UK holds stocks of PPE, including respirators through national stockpiles. We are doing everything we can to increase levels of critical PPE through buying as much available product from existing global markets and working with suppliers to make more products. This includes increasing capacity amongst existing PPE manufacturers wherever possible and working with businesses across the economy to divert their manufacturing capacity to PPE products. A technical assurance process is in place, supported by the Health and Safety Executive, Public Health England, and other regulatory bodies so that new and alternative products are checked for effectiveness and safety.

On 10 April 2020, the plan for a national effort on PPE was published at the following link:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/879221/Coronavirus_COVID-19_-_personal_protective_equipment_PPE_plan.pdf

■ Coronavirus: Mental Health Services

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan: [43101]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to offer psychological support to the family members of people who have died with covid-19.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan: [43103]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to offer psychological support to the family members of people who have died during the covid-19 lockdown and who are unable to attend funerals.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

A number of charities and voluntary organisations provide a range of valued services for people experiencing bereavement, including Cruse Bereavement Care which provides a national helpline as does the National Bereavement Partnership COVID-19 Hub. For National Health Service staff, a confidential bereavement support line and other sources of support are available at the following link:

<https://people.nhs.uk/help/>

The Government is taking a cross-Government approach to address bereavement support, and what is needed to ensure that families and friends of those deceased get the support they need - particularly during this very difficult time.

We are working with the NHS, arm's length bodies and other organisations to assess the increased need for psychological support as a result of COVID-19 and are committed to ongoing engagement with the voluntary sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. We will continue to work closely to assess how we can support charities in doing their important work.

■ Coronavirus: Protective Clothing

Ben Lake: [38972]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the implications for his policies of the 27 February 2020 WHO interim guidance on the use of personal protective equipment for covid-19.

Ben Lake: [38973]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he has made an assessment of the implications for his policies of the 19 March 2020 WHO interim guidance on the prevention and control of infection in health care when covid-19 is suspected.

Ben Lake: [38974]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department's guidance on covid-19 personal protective equipment aligns with the 27 February 2020 WHO interim guidance on that equipment.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 27 April 2020]: The guidance on personal protective equipment (PPE) is part of COVID-19: infection prevention and control guidance. This is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control>

The United Kingdom PPE guidance continues to recommend the highest level of protection for health and social care teams treating COVID-19 patients. The guidance is updated regularly, in line with emerging evidence.

The World Health Organization has stated that the national guidelines currently used in the UK and other countries are consistent with their recommendations and it does not fall short of their standards. Further information is available to view at the following link:

<https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/modes-of-transmission-of-virus-causing-covid-19-implications-for-ipc-precaution-recommendations>

Justin Madders:

[42087]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of the findings by the Royal College of Physicians published on 24 April 2020, entitled Tracking the impact of COVID-19 on the workforce, that access to personal protective equipment declined during April 2020.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 6 May 2020]: We are working around the clock to give the social care sector and wider National Health Service the equipment and support they need to tackle this outbreak. The Government published 'Coronavirus (COVID-19): personal protective equipment (PPE) plan' on 10 April. It incorporates guidance on who needs PPE and when they need it, routes to ensure those who need it can get it at the right time and sets out actions to secure enough PPE to last through the crisis.

Systems set up to supply 226 NHS trusts have increased their operations in a matter of weeks to provide drops of critical equipment to 58,000 healthcare settings including general practitioners, pharmacies and social care providers. The creation of this PPE distribution network has required a huge increase in the logistics capability.

■ Coronavirus: Research

Stephen Doughty:

[43028]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health & Social Care, whether he plans to take steps to ensure that the publicly funded research and development costs of (a) a vaccine for covid-19 and (b) drugs to treat that disease are (i) published and (ii) provided to (A) other governments and (B) the WHO's Global Observatory on Health Research and Development.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 11 May 2020]: The United Kingdom Government has committed £24.6 million for COVID-19 research through a joint Rapid Response Research Call and is providing over £45 million in funding to two UK vaccine candidates. Details of the projects funded through the joint Rapid Response call, including the amount of funding granted are publicly available on the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and UK Research and Innovation-Medical Research Council websites.

The UK Government is a signatory of the 2013 Helsinki declaration which states that research studies must be registered on an internationally recognised trial registry. The International Standard Randomised Controlled Trial Number Register is the internationally recognised registry of choice for primary research in the UK and feeds into the World Health Organization's own systems. All NIHR-funded primary research studies are required to register in an appropriate registry.

■ Coronavirus: Screening**Wendy Chamberlain:**[\[40768\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the availability of the chemical reagents required for covid-19 testing.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The National Health Service and Public Health England's capacity is predominantly comprised of 'closed' platforms, which use proprietary reagents, and the demand for proprietary test kits is significantly greater than global supply leading to world-wide shortages in the United Kingdom and other countries. We have addressed these challenges by increasing global allocation from suppliers, increasing use of open platforms and increasing use of low throughput 'desk top' polymerase chain reaction (PCR) machines. Through this work we now have test kits for over 100,000 tests a day and are continuing to work with industry and other partners to increase the availability of COVID-19 test kits.

Justin Madders:[\[41079\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish the names of all covid-19 tests that are currently in use.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 4 May 2020]: There are a number of commercial and National Health Service developed viral detection tests in use within the NHS and Public Health England and there are eight key testing platforms which deliver the majority of testing. All these tests are clinically validated and have high levels of performance. We are in the process of clinically reviewing a number of laboratory-based antibody tests for roll-out across the United Kingdom.

Justin Madders:[\[41080\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent estimate he has made of the false-negative rate of each covid-19 test.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 4 May 2020]: Viral Detection Tests have high levels of clinical sensitivity at close to 100%. We continue to study the clinical sensitivity levels of leading antibody tests and are seeking a test that provides more than 98% sensitivity for use for diagnostics purposes. In addition, the National Health Service take all steps to ensure we minimise the occurrence of false results using our highly skilled and regulated biomedical and clinical scientists working within laboratories that work to recognised international standards for clinical testing.

Justin Madders:**[41081]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish the names of each covid-19 test that has been used by the NHS and that is no longer in use; and for what reasons each such test is no longer in use.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 4 May 2020]: There are a number of commercial and National Health Service developed viral detection tests in use within the NHS and Public Health England (PHE), and there are eight key testing platforms which deliver the majority of testing. All these tests are clinically validated and have high levels of performance.

■ Coronavirus: Social Services**Bridget Phillipson:****[35066]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans he has to monitor the effect of emergency legislation on Coronavirus on recipients of social care.

Helen Whately:

The Coronavirus Act 2020 introduced new Care Act easements to ensure the best possible care for people in our society during this exceptional period.

The guidance states that local authorities should report any decision to operate under easements, and the reasoning behind this decision, to the Department. This information is collated and will be used to monitor the easements internally.

The Care Quality Commission, Think Local Act Personal, the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, the Local Government Association, the Care and Support Alliance and the Chief Social Worker are currently considering how to monitor the use of easements and gain a wider understanding of how COVID-19 impacts people receiving care and support by using a more person-centred approach to monitoring.

Full guidance has been published at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-changes-to-the-care-act-2014/care-act-easements-guidance-for-local-authorities>

■ Coronavirus: Surgery

Steve McCabe:

[37433]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment his Department has made of the potential merits of including patients that are recovering from major operations in the list of vulnerable people that are eligible for covid-19 support.

Jo Churchill:

The Chief Medical Officer has led a thorough clinical review process to identify six categories of underlying clinical conditions which place someone at very high risk of severe illness if they contract COVID-19. Those who are recovering from major operations are not automatically included in the list of extremely clinically vulnerable people, as they will have a wide range of needs. For some, staying at home at all times and avoiding contact with others may slow their recovery. General practitioners and hospital clinicians have the discretion to add individual patients to the list based on careful, clinical assessments of each individual's needs.

The Government and civil society are providing additional support to people even where they are not clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19. This includes providing local authorities with £3.2 billion additional funding for service pressures, strengthening links with supermarkets, and mobilising over 750,000 National Health Service volunteers. The Government has also launched a new set of webpages for those who need additional support due to the pandemic across a range of issues, which are regularly updated at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/find-coronavirus-support>

■ Dietary Supplements: Advertising

Alberto Costa:

[41520]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps his Department is taking to regulate the advertisement of vitamins and diet supplements on (a) social media and (b) other media platforms.

Jo Churchill:

The advertising of vitamins and dietary supplements is governed by Regulation (EC) No 1924/2006 on nutrition and health claims, Regulation (EU) No 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers, and the Food Safety Act 1990.

This legislation is incorporated into the United Kingdom Codes on Broadcast Advertising and Non-broadcast Advertising and Direct and Promotional Marketing. These Codes provide the rules for advertising and marketing across social media and other media platforms. The Advertising Standards Authority is the UK's independent advertising regulator, responsible for administering and assessing compliance with its codes, ensuring that the self-regulatory system works in the public interest. If advertisers and broadcasters persistently break the Advertising Codes they may be referred to other bodies for further action, such as Trading Standards or Ofcom.

■ Disease Control

Dr Matthew Offord:

[37613]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, on what date his Department most recently undertook a rehearsal exercise for a pandemic; what outcomes his Department identified from that exercise; and how many of those outcomes were not reversed and were not implemented.

Jo Churchill:

The most recent National Level (Tier 1) exercise to test preparedness for a pandemic was Exercise Cygnus. Exercise Cygnus assessed the United Kingdom's preparedness and response to a pandemic influenza and took place in October 2016.

Exercises at both the national and local level form an essential element of the Government's pandemic influenza preparedness programme. In addition to National Level (Tier 1) exercises, smaller scale exercises to test response plans for infectious disease outbreaks have been undertaken. The Government also supports organisations at the local level to develop and exercise their pandemic plans.

In February 2020 an exercise was held to rehearse Ministerial-level decision-making for the UK's pandemic preparedness and response within the context of what was known at that point about the COVID-19 outbreak.

■ Drugs: Misuse

Dr Dan Poulter:

[42984]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the level of illegal drug use during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

The Government is monitoring the impacts of COVID-19 on illegal drug use and, working with law enforcement, will respond to any subsequent changes in the supply and demand for drugs. Public Health England (PHE) is also working with partners to analyse the impact of COVID-19 on drug use and drug-related harms.

It is important that local authorities maintain drug and alcohol treatment services during the COVID-19 pandemic. PHE is working with treatment providers to make sure that people who are drug and alcohol dependent get the support and treatment that they need. Guidance to support commissioners and providers of services for people who use drugs during the COVID-19 pandemic has been published and is available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-commissioners-and-providers-of-services-for-people-who-use-drugs-or-alcohol/covid-19-guidance-for-commissioners-and-providers-of-services-for-people-who-use-drugs-or-alcohol>

■ Exercise Cygnus

Wendy Chamberlain:

[\[42190\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what plans his Department has to publish the findings of Exercise Cygnus.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 6 May 2020]: The Department does not routinely publish reports on exercises.

■ General Practitioners: Assessments

Michael Fabricant:

[\[40966\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he plans to take to prevent a shortfall of GPs qualifying in 2020 due to the cancellation of the postgraduate assessments (a) Applied Knowledge Test and (b) Clinical Skills Assessment, as a result of covid-19 outbreak; and what assessment he has made of the viability of using another form of such assessment during the covid-19 lock-down.

Jo Churchill:

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and the four statutory education bodies are rapidly developing a temporary recorded alternative to the Clinical Skills Assessment (subject to approval by the General Medical Council). The RCGP have advised that this will provide trainees with an opportunity to demonstrate their competence to be awarded a Certificate of Completion of Training and qualify as a GP.

At the same time, the RCGP is working with their testing partner to enable the Applied Knowledge Test to resume at test centres with appropriate social distancing safeguards in place from July. The RCGP is also investigating options for remote invigilation for those who are shielding.

■ General Practitioners: North East

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[43196\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many (a) GPs and (b) GP vacancies there are in the North East of England; and how many and what proportion of GPs are employed on a locum basis in that region.

Jo Churchill:

The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) doctors working in general practice in the North East and Yorkshire NHS England Region as of December 2019 has been provided in the following table.

-	FTE
General practitioners (GPs) (all)	5,122
Locums	148

The data requested on the number of vacancies is not available in the format requested.

Mr Richard Holden: [\[43197\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to review the use of locum GPs in the North East of England.

Jo Churchill:

County Durham Clinical Commissioning Group has reported that there is not a workforce issue in primary care in the area and that general practice is managing well with a high proportion of consultations now provided over the phone or online. Locums are being used where required in the short term where there are shortages. At a national level, general practitioner (GP) locums as well as returners and substantive GPs wishing to increase their hours are providing additional patient care within the NHS 111 COVID-19 Clinical Assessment Services.

■ Health Professions: Protective Clothing

Justin Madders: [\[42089\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effect on female clinicians of the design of face masks used as personal protective equipment.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 6 May 2020]: The National Medical Director and Chief Nursing Officer of NHS England and NHS Improvement wrote to National Health Service Chief Executives, Chief Nurses and Medical Directors, emphasising the importance of proper fit testing of disposable sessional personal protective equipment (PPE) face masks (such as FFP3 masks).

The United Kingdom Government and devolved administrations have published clear guidance on appropriate PPE for health and social care workers. It is critical that health and care workers make themselves aware of and follow these procedures, so they do not risk exposing themselves to COVID-19 as they remove PPE.

■ Health Services: Protective Clothing

Jonathan Ashworth: [\[38623\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to his Department's guidance on the use of personal protective equipment, whether (a) naso-gastric or (b) naso-jejunal tubes are classed as an aerosol generating procedure; and what advice his Department took to reach this decision.

Jo Churchill:

Placement of naso-gastric and naso-jejunal tubes are not currently categorised as aerosol generating procedures (AGPs). The evidence around AGPs is being kept under review and the evidence review is led by Public Health Scotland.

The Department's expert advisory committee on New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) members and invited experts are assessing the evidence base for medical procedures which create a higher risk of respiratory infection transmission from patient to healthcare worker. A rapid evidence appraisal has been conducted to assess the risk of patient to healthcare worker infection transmission associated with a wide range of potentially aerosol generating medical procedures. An updated evidence review and the position on the presented evidence review from NERVTAG is awaited.

Hyperactivity**Nadia Whittome:**[\[42229\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many adult ADHD (a) tests and (b) diagnoses have taken place in (i) England, (ii) Wales and (iii) Northern Ireland in each month from 30 April 2019 and 30 April 2020.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 6 May 2020]: In England, information is not collected specifically relating to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). However, the Department has been working with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and their ADHD Implementation Working Group to look at how the current NICE guidance and quality standard on ADHD are being implemented and to inform discussions about how data can be improved.

NHS Digital continue to work with the Department and NHS England on the development of access and waiting times reporting for mental health care pathways. Consideration is being given as to how collection of data on ADHD can be improved on a national level, including improving consistency and comparability of any data currently collected.

Information on tests and diagnoses for Wales and Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the devolved administrations.

Mental Health Services: Finance**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:**[\[43107\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what additional resources his Department has allocated to NHS Mental Health Services since the start of the covid-19 outbreak.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

The Government has recently announced an additional £5 million grant to Mind and the Mental Health Consortia to administer a COVID-19 mental health response fund to mental health voluntary and community sector organisations across England. The

aim is to promote mental health and wellbeing support, which complements NHS services, to those struggling with their mental health and will include peer support, telephone and online support.

We are also working to protect vital mental health services and support people with mental health issues particularly those shielding or self-isolating. We have published official guidance for the public on mental health and wellbeing and for parents and carers about supporting their children's mental health and wellbeing and are promoting this through trusted channels like GOV.UK and Every Mind Matters.

■ Mental Health Services: Protective Clothing

Mr Stephen Morgan: [40745]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what assessment he has made of the effect of the current availability of level 3 PPE in 24-hour mental health wards on the ability of frontline staff to do their job (a) safely and (b) effectively.

Mr Stephen Morgan: [40746]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the availability of FFP3 masks in 24-hour mental health wards during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 4 May 2020]: We are working around the clock to give the health and social care sector and wider National Health service the equipment and support they need to tackle this outbreak.

The NHS Supply Chain and Clipper Logistics supported by the Armed Forces, are working to push personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies to every NHS trust in England, expanding from 226 NHS trusts prior to the pandemic, to now 58,000 different providers.

On 28 April, we delivered over 21 million items of PPE across the health and social care system within England. This figure included 1.4 million masks.

Mr Stephen Morgan: [40747]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure frontline staff on mental health wards are trained to use FFP3 masks safely.

Jo Churchill:

Videos and training materials for the use of personal protective equipment, such as FFP3 masks, have been published on the GOV.UK site and can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe-plan>

We are working with nursing, Medical Royal Colleges and the care provider industry bodies to ensure that frontline staff are aware of this guidance.

■ Mental Health Services: Staff

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan:

[43093]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many staff were employed by each mental health trust in (a) 2010 and (b) 2019.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

NHS Digital publishes Hospital and Community Health Services workforce statistics. These include staff working in hospital trusts and clinical commissioning groups, but not staff working in primary care, general practitioner surgeries, local authorities or other providers.

The following table shows the number of all staff at the mental health trusts specified as at September 2010, September 2019 and January 2020, the latest available data, full time equivalent.

-	SEPTEMBER 2010	SEPTEMBER 2019	JANUARY 2020
Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust	3,301	3,542	3,616
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust	2,037	2,973	3,051
Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Trust	3,727	3,760	3,829
Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust	1,056	1,138	1,198
Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust	2,633	4,660	4,689
South West London and St George's Mental Health NHS Trust	2,146	2,077	2,146
Suffolk Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust	1,560	-	-
Worcestershire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust	1,219	-	-

Provider staff from Enfield Primary Care Trust were transferred to Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust in March 2011.

Greater Manchester West Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust acquired Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust to form Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust in January 2017.

Suffolk Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust and Norfolk and Waveney Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust merged to become Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust in January 2012.

Worcestershire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust and Worcestershire Primary Care Trust merged to form Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust in July 2011.

■ NHS and Social Services: Protective Clothing

Alex Sobel:

[39789]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether his Department plans to issue guidance to front line NHS and care workers on the reuse of personal protective equipment.

Jo Churchill:

Public Health England published 'COVID-19 personal protective equipment (PPE)' updated guide on 17 April. This advises that suitable decontamination arrangements for some PPE items should be obtained from the manufacturer, supplier or local infection control. This guidance also included advice on when PPE can be reused.

Public Health England's guide can be viewed at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>

■ NHS: Computer Software

Mr David Jones:

[43608]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether he held discussions with his counterparts in the (a) Welsh Government, (b) Scottish Government and (c) Northern Ireland Executive on trialling the NHS contact tracing app in those parts of the UK.

Ms Nadine Dorries:

[Holding answer 11 May 2020]: The National Health Service COVID-19 app will be part of a wider approach that will involve contact tracing and testing. The Department and NHSX have been working closely with our partners in the devolved administrations throughout this outbreak, including on our contact tracing work, and will continue to do so going forward.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has weekly calls with his devolved administration counterparts and a representative from each devolved administration sits on the app oversight board.

■ NHS: Conditions of Employment

Mike Amesbury:

[42176]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether the £60,000 guarantee on death in service benefits for frontline health and care staff during the covid-19 outbreak will be paid in addition to the death in service benefit for members of the NHS pension scheme.

Helen Whately:

The Government is in the process of setting up a life assurance scheme for frontline health and social care staff in England who contract COVID-19 during the course of their work.

The life assurance scheme is non-contributory and pays a £60,000 lump sum where staff die as a result of COVID-19 and had been recently working in frontline roles and locations where personal care is provided to individuals who have recently contracted COVID-19.

The NHS Pension Scheme provides death in service cover of two times annual pay to active members who are yet to retire, to support a member's partner and dependents, should they die before claiming their retirement benefits. Membership of the NHS Pension Scheme is voluntary and around 90% of National Health Service staff are active scheme members.

The lump sum from the life assurance scheme will be paid in addition to any death benefit entitlement from the NHS Pension Scheme.

■ NHS: Protective Clothing

Olivia Blake:

[37795]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will make it his policy to ensure that personal protective equipment provided to NHS workers tackling the covid-19 outbreak is compliant with the standards as specified by the World Health Organization.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 27 April 2020]: The United Kingdom Government and devolved administrations published clear guidance on COVID-19 personal protective equipment for health and social care workers. This has been written and reviewed by all four UK public health bodies and informed by National Health Service infection prevention control experts. The guidance can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>

The guidance is consistent with World Health Organization (WHO) guidance for protecting health and social care workers from COVID-19.

More information can be found at this following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-personal-protective-equipment-ppe-guidance-for-nhs-teams>

■ Ovarian Cancer: Diagnosis

Daisy Cooper: [43172]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will update NHS England guidance to allow patients with suspected ovarian cancer to be referred for a CA125 blood test and ultrasound at the same time to shorten the diagnostic pathway.

Jo Churchill:

The CA125 Blood test, followed by an ultrasound for raised CA125, is the current process recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

■ Palliative Care

Rosie Cooper: [42948]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to ensure that (a) people with learning disabilities and autism and (b) other people are not unlawfully having Do not resuscitate or Do not attempt cardio pulmonary resuscitation written into their medical records.

Helen Whately:

[Holding answer 11 May 2020]: We are clear that it is completely unacceptable for do not attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation (DNACPR) decisions to be applied in a blanket fashion to any group of people, or for a DNACPR decision to be put in place without appropriate consultation with the patient concerned, or their families and carers if the patient lacks capacity.

The guidance, published jointly by the British Medical Association, the Resuscitation Council (UK) and the Royal College of Nursing, is clear that resuscitation decisions must be tailored to the individual circumstances of the patient and must not be made on the basis of blanket assumptions applied to particular groups. The guidance is available at the following link:

<https://www.resus.org.uk/dnacpr/decisions-relating-to-cpr/>

We have commended this guidance to the National Health Service, as the basis for local policies on resuscitation.

On 30 March, the Care Quality Commission, British Medical Association, Care Provider Alliance and Royal College of General Practitioners wrote to adult social care providers and general practitioner practices to set out their shared position on the importance of advance care planning being based on the needs of the individual. This statement is available at the following link:

<https://www.cqc.org.uk/news/stories/joint-statement-advance-care-planning>

NHS England and NHS Improvement have also written to the NHS regarding the appropriate use of DNACPR decisions for people with learning disabilities and other vulnerable groups. These letters are available at the following links:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/04/C0166-Letter-DNACPR.pdf>

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/04/maintaining-standards-quality-of-care-pressurised-circumstances-7-april-2020.pdf>

We are working with the social care sector to understand their experiences of the wrongful application of DNACPR decisions and what further action may be needed to address inappropriate practices.

■ Palliative Care: Children and Young People

Dr Caroline Johnson:

[41133]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish guidance on palliative care for children and young people in community and hospice settings during the covid-19 outbreak.

Helen Whately:

Working with key stakeholders, NHS England and NHS Improvement have developed a standard operating procedure (SOP), for palliative care for children and young people in community and hospice settings during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is due to be published shortly.

The SOP is aimed at supporting staff who are providing care or supporting children and young people, and their families, who have palliative and/or end of life care needs in the community, including home and hospice care. Palliative care will include some children and young people who have life-limiting long-term conditions and complex health needs. It encourages all providers of children's palliative care (statutory and voluntary sector) to work collaboratively and flexibly across health settings to support this group of children and young people and keep them safe during the pandemic.

■ PANDORA: Overseas Aid

Stephen Doughty:

[42049]

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, pursuant to the Answer of 30 April 2020 to Question 38926, how much funding the Pan-African Network for Rapid Research, Response, Relief and Preparedness for Infectious Disease Epidemics has received from Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding through his Department's ODA-funded global health research portfolio in each of the last five years.

Helen Whately:

The 5 million euros funding from the Department to the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) in support of the four-year March 2018

to February 2022 project the Pan-African Network for Rapid Research, Response, Relief and Preparedness for Infectious Disease Epidemics (PANDORA-ID-NET) was made in December 2017 as part of the Department's contribution to EDCTP's 2016 workplan. To date EDCTP has disbursed 2.8 million euros in 2018 and 546,000 euros in 2020 to the PANDORA-ID-NET project, a total of 3,346,000 euros in the Department's Official Development Assistance funding.

■ Protective Clothing

Justin Madders: [\[39008\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what recent discussions he has had with (a) Public Health England and (b) professional bodies on ensuring that guidance on personal protective equipment is in the best interests of (i) staff and (ii) patient safety.

Jo Churchill:

The United Kingdom Government and devolved administrations have published clear guidance on appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for health and social care workers as well as specific patient use of PPE. This has been written and reviewed by all four UK public health bodies and informed by National Health Service infection prevention control experts and the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG).

Our guidance is consistent with World Health Organization guidance for protecting health and social care workers from COVID-19. The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, Royal College of Nursing and Royal College of Midwives have played a lead role in developing the guidance.

■ Protective Clothing: Disease Control

Justin Madders: [\[41497\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many respirator masks were held in the pandemic stockpile on 31 December of each of the last 10 years.

Justin Madders: [\[41498\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many gowns were held in the pandemic stockpile on 31 December of each of the last 10 years.

Justin Madders: [\[41499\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many visors were held in the pandemic stockpile on 31 December of each of the last 10 years.

Justin Madders: [\[41500\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many gloves were held in the pandemic stockpile on 31 December in each of the last ten years.

Justin Madders: [\[41501\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many swabs were held in the pandemic stockpile on 31 December in each the last 10 years.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 4 May 2020]: The Department's advisory Committee for New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (NERVTAG) makes recommendations to the Government on what medicines and clinical consumables should be stockpiled for pandemic influenza preparedness including relevant scientific information that is used for estimating target stock levels.

NERVTAG has recommended the stockpiling of (amongst other products) FFP3 respirators, eye protection, aprons and gloves. Data on the number of respirator masks, eye protection, aprons and gloves are not published in the format requested.

Surgical gowns are not currently part of the pandemic stockpile. Public Health England is currently implementing a commission to add these items to the stockpile.

There are no recommendations from NERVTAG to stockpile swabs.

■ Protective Clothing: Procurement**Catherine West:****[37877]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps the Government is taking to expedite procurement processes for personal protective equipment.

Jo Churchill:

The Government's Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) plan was published on 10 April and can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe-plan>

As Strand 3 details, we have set up a cross-Government PPE sourcing unit to secure new supply lines from across the world and a call to industry has been issued to companies at home to manufacture and supply additional PPE at scale.

There has been limited United Kingdom manufacture of PPE to date and so new supply channels for materials to make PPE have been sourced at pace in order to enable new manufacturing to commence.

We are working with industry partners such as the Royal Mint, Burberry and Jaguar Land Rover to produce gowns and face visors and Don & Low will be manufacturing 12 million metres squared of fabric for gowns over the next six months. We are also in conversation with several additional manufacturers regarding the production of eye protection, masks and gowns to start this new sector of UK manufacturing.

Dr Julian Lewis:**[38411]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, if he will publish the contact details for a team in his Department that companies able to supply large quantities of PPE from abroad can use to explain what PPE products they are able to supply; and if he will take steps to ensure that those companies receive a timely response.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 27 April 2020]: The Government's Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) plan was published on 10 April and can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe-plan>

As Strand 3 details, we have set up a cross-Government PPE sourcing unit to secure new supply lines from across the world and a call to industry has been issued to companies at home to manufacture and supply additional PPE at scale.

All offers to supply PPE must be made through the United Kingdom Government's online portal:

<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-support-from-business>

All offers will receive an immediate automated response and then follow up contact once the team have assessed the offer.

Justin Madders:[\[42086\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, how many additional items of personal protective equipment were bought in response to the recommendations of the New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group meeting in June 2019.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 6 May 2020]: No new visors were bought in response to the recommendation as the stock of eye glasses did not require replenishment. A procurement for surgical gowns had commenced but not completed before the commencement of the COVID-19 incident.

■ Protective Clothing: Turkey**Liam Byrne:**[\[39477\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what (a) quantity and (b) items of personal protective equipment were transported from Turkey to the UK by the RAF on 20 April 2020.

Jo Churchill:

185,000 gowns and coveralls were transported from Turkey to the United Kingdom by the Royal Air Force on 22 April.

■ Social Services: Coronavirus**Dr Luke Evans:**[\[37783\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what mental health support he has put in place for people working in the care sector responding to increased numbers of people dying as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Helen Whately:

This is clearly a very challenging time for our frontline workers. The Government wants everybody working in social care to feel like they have somewhere to turn, or someone to talk to, when they are finding things difficult.

'Our Frontline' has recently been launched, a collaboration between Samaritans, Shout, Hospice UK and Mind to provide information, emotional support and access to a crisis text service for those working on the frontline, including in social care.

Later this month we will also be introducing a website and app aimed at providing timely information for the social care workforce. It will include resources dedicated to help individuals and their teams manage in this new situation, understand what they might need to be doing differently to support each other, and pay attention to their mental and physical wellbeing.

■ Social Services: Protective Clothing**Mr Stephen Morgan:**[\[40750\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what steps he is taking to increase the number of FFP3 masks available in the social care sector.

Jo Churchill:

[Holding answer 4 May 2020]: In response to calls from a number of local resilience forums (LRFs), we extended our personal protective equipment (PPE) supply route to LRFs to help local government distribute stock to social care providers and other vital services where they have been unable to obtain PPE through their usual routes and have an urgent need.

On 28 April, we delivered over 21 million items of PPE across the health and social care system within England. This figure included 1.4 million masks; 3.3 million aprons; 27,000 gowns; and 14.5 million gloves.

Unprecedented efforts are being undertaken to replenish and distribute PPE to all service providers, to ensure demand is met and the right equipment reaches our frontline.

HOME OFFICE**■ Action Fraud****Steve McCabe:**[\[43831\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Answer of 3 February 2020 to Question 3275 on Action Fraud, what steps her Department is taking to increase the capacity of Action Fraud to meet increased demand.

James Brokenshire:

The City of London Corporation (as the Police Authority for the City of London Police) commissioned an independent review by Sir Craig Mackey QPM into the standards, culture and management of Action Fraud. The finding and recommendations of that

review were published on 24th January: <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/about-the-city/Pages/police-authority.aspx>

Working with the City of London Corporation, the NCA and Home Office, the City of London Police will address Sir Craig's recommendations regarding Action Fraud and the NFIB.

In addition, as part of the 20/21 police funding settlement, City of London Police received additional funding to allow them to recruit additional staff for the Action Fraud call centre. Despite the current challenging circumstances, work has continued to recruit and develop remote training for these additional staff at pace.

■ Counter-terrorism

Neil Coyle:

[43673]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what criteria her Department uses to (a) commission and (b) monitor the services which support the Prevent Strategy.

James Brokenshire:

The Prevent Duty, as the basis of the Prevent strategy, applies to the public sector authorities listed in Schedule 6 of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015. It requires authorities to have due regard to the need to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. Placing a duty on these specified authorities means citizens most vulnerable to radicalisation can be identified and offered appropriate support at the earliest opportunity. We work closely with several monitors and regulators to ensure that the relevant specified authorities comply with this statutory duty in the course of their normal functions. The Home Office conducts an annual monitoring survey of local authorities to track compliance with the Prevent Duty and conducts regular monitoring of the Channel programme (the multi-agency programme that supports people vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism) to ensure delivery is in line with the national guidance.

Although all local authorities are bound by the Prevent Duty, Home Office Prevent funding is awarded to local authorities where the threat from terrorism and the risk of radicalisation is highest. This enables them to fund dedicated Prevent posts and locally commission projects delivered by Civil Society Organisations. Monitoring is an important part of the Prevent strategy and the Home Office requires all areas that receive Prevent funding to submit quarterly returns which capture outputs, achievements, issues and expenditure.

■ Immigrants: Finance

Amy Callaghan:

[39761]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will allow people who have the ability to work on their current visa but have no access to public funds to be temporarily granted access to public funds for income during the covid-19 outbreak.

Chris Philp:

The Home Office is working closely with other government departments to support people, including migrants with no recourse to public funds, through this crisis. We are taking a compassionate and pragmatic approach to an unprecedented situation and are continually reviewing to consider what more can be done.

Migrants with leave under the Family and Human Rights routes can apply to have the NRPF restriction lifted by making a 'change of conditions' application if there has been a change in their financial circumstances. The Home Office has recently digitised the application form to make sure it is accessible for those who need to remain at home, and I can assure you that the applications are being dealt with swiftly and compassionately.

Many of the wide-ranging Covid-19 measures the government has put in place are not public funds and therefore are available to migrants with no recourse to public funds (NRPF). The Coronavirus job retention scheme, self-employment income support and statutory sick pay are not classed as public funds for immigration purposes. Contribution-based benefits are also not classed as public funds for immigration purposes. Similarly, the support the Government is providing to the rented sector and in respect of mortgages is available to all regardless of their immigration status.

In addition, the Government has made in excess of £3.2bn of funding available to local authorities in England and additional funding under the Barnett formula to the devolved administrations to enable them to respond to Covid-19 pressures across all the services they deliver, including services helping the most vulnerable.

More information on the support available to migrants, including those with NRPF, can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-get-support-if-youre-a-migrant-living-in-the-uk>.

■ Immigrants: Health Services**Tulip Siddiq:****[43715]**

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will make it her policy to permanently exempt (a) NHS staff and (b) the families of NHS staff from the Immigration Health Surcharge.

Kevin Foster:

We welcome the vital contribution NHS staff from across the globe make to our healthcare system.

The Government has recently announced a series of measures for key health workers on the frontline fighting coronavirus. Visas will be automatically extended for 12 months free of charge and there will be no Immigration Health Surcharge for the extension. These measures apply to NHS doctors, nurses and paramedics, and we have recently expanded this offer to cover more key NHS frontline health workers, including those working in eligible occupations in the independent health and care sector. This will also apply to their family members. The automatic extension offer will

be for those whose visas expire between 31 March and 1 October. We estimate around 3,000 healthcare professionals, plus their families, will benefit.

Going forward, it is right those who come to the UK contribute to the NHS whose services they can access from when they arrive. Income from the Immigration Health Surcharge goes directly back into the NHS to help provide vital and lifesaving services.

■ Migrant Workers: NHS

Fleur Anderson: [44051]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will grant indefinite leave to remain for all foreign nationals working in the NHS.

Kevin Foster:

The Government has announced we will extend the visas for a range of healthcare professionals working for the NHS and independent health and care providers, where their current visa expires before 1 October. This offer also applies to their families. The 12-month extension is automatic and free of charge and those benefitting will not have to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge.

The Home Secretary has confirmed we will grant immediate Indefinite Leave to Remain to families of eligible NHS health workers who die as a result of contracting Coronavirus.

■ Prevent Independent Review

Neil Coyle: [43671]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the timetable announced by her Department in April 2019 for appointing an Independent Reviewer of Prevent remains in place; and whether the independent review of that strategy will be completed by August 2020.

Neil Coyle: [43672]

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, whether the deadline for submissions to the independent review of Prevent is 7 July 2020, as announced by her Department.

James Brokenshire:

The Government decided to appoint the next Independent Reviewer of Prevent, following Lord Carlile stepping down, by a full and open competition. The recruitment competition was launched on 27 April 2020. Applications for this post will be open until 11pm on 1 June 2020 and the successful candidate will be announced in due course. For more information on this recruitment please see <https://publicappointments.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/appointment/independent-reviewer-of-prevent/>.

A full and open process will take several months, and we want to ensure that the new Reviewer has sufficient time to complete the Review. We are aware that this is likely

to have implications for the Reviewer's ability to meet the existing legislative timescale for completing the Review (12 August 2020), and we are taking steps to address this. Further details will be provided to Parliament at the earliest opportunity.

Once the Reviewer has been appointed, that person will agree revised terms of reference and have the discretion to decide how to conduct the Review.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Homelessness: Coronavirus

Caroline Lucas:

[43614]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, how homelessness accommodation providers can apply for financial support through the coronavirus funding package for frontline charities announced on 8 April 2020; what her Department's timeline is for the delivery of that funding; and if he will make a statement.

Luke Hall:

We have announced a £6 million fund to support the homelessness and rough sleeping charity sector as they respond to the challenges brought about by COVID-19. This is part of a £360 million fund that is to be allocated by central Government departments in support of the voluntary sector.

The fund will support frontline homelessness and rough sleeping charities in their effort to help keep homeless people and rough sleepers safe and supported during the coronavirus pandemic. Details on the delivery of the fund will be set out in due course.

In addition, charities can access many of the support measures the Chancellor has announced for businesses, including deferring their VAT bills, paying no business rates on charity shops next year, and furloughing staff where possible with the Government paying 80 per cent of their wages.

As well as this, £370 million for small and medium-sized charities, including through a grant to the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) for those in England, will support those organisations at the heart of local communities which are making a big difference during the outbreak. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is working at pace with NLCF to determine the application criteria which will be available in due course.

■ Local Government: Coronavirus

Mr Stephen Morgan:

[43154]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to engage with Local Resilience Forums on the effect of easing lockdown measures on the ability of public services to prepare for business as normal after the covid-19 outbreak.

Christopher Pincher:

All Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) have a dedicated Government Liaison Officer from MHCLG who provides a direct line of contact into central government. MHCLG engages frequently with all LRFs to discuss the Covid-19 response and will continue to work with them closely following the Prime Minister's statement of 10 May 2019 on the next phase.

Mr Stephen Morgan:[\[43155\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps he is taking to engage with the Local Government Association on public services preparing for business as normal after the covid-19.

Mr Simon Clarke:

There has been regular and significant contact between Ministers, regional mayors, council leaders, and the Local Government Association providing support to local authorities during the Covid-19 emergency.

The Secretary of State has hosted regular teleconferences for all local government leaders and chief executives, with other Ministers present to answer questions. My Department is also discussing priorities and support measures with councils in each of the nine English regions. Further to this, a Ministerial-led Economic Recovery Working Group has been established, made up of local government leaders from across England including several Metro Mayors to help inform Government's plans for economic recovery.

Officials will continue to liaise regularly with local authorities to understand the challenges and concerns regarding the easing of restrictions and how we adapt our public services and public spaces to enable their safe usage.

■ Religion: Coronavirus**Ruth Jones:**[\[43164\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what Government financial support is being provided to faith groups, institutions and organisations in (a) Newport West constituency, (b) Wales and (c) the UK who have lost income as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Luke Hall:

Financial support provisions for faith groups, institutions and organisations in Newport West and Wales in general are devolved matters and the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly, with matters in Scotland and Northern Ireland the responsibility of the respective governments.

As the Department responsible for Faith, MHCLG continues to play a facilitative role in ensuring Government understands the needs of faith communities and the challenges they may be currently facing due to the pandemic. We are working closely with a range of faith and community groups to better understand how Government can

support them to respond to the pressures they face on sustaining their organisations during this period of time.

There are a range of Government-backed financial support measures that these organisations in the United Kingdom can access.

The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme and the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Scheme are both available to registered charities, and therefore places of worship registered with the Charities Commission. Registered charities have now been exempted from the requirement that the applicant derives at least 50 per cent of its income from its trading activity, so that more charities can access the scheme.

Any person or organisation, including places of worship, that is unable to pay any HMRC bill due to Covid-19 should get in contact through the HMRC Coronavirus helpline. HMRC will be able to agree payment plans, which can include a gap before any initial payment is required. If charities or places of worship are VAT registered, they are also able to use the VAT deferral scheme.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme provides support for entity with a UK payroll - small or large, charitable or non-profit, to be reimbursed 80 per cent of furloughed worker wages by HMRC, up to a cap of £2500 per month.

However, we know that some charities cannot furlough staff as they are contributing to the frontline response. There is a substantial package of targeted support for charities on the frontline of responding to Covid-19. The Chancellor on 9 April announced overall £750 million of funding for charities providing key frontline services to vulnerable people affected by the pandemic. Further details can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-sets-out-extra-750-million-coronavirus-funding-for-frontline-charities> £60 million of the funding will be allocated through the Barnett formula so the devolved administrations are funded to provide similar support in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

■ Temporary Accommodation: Coronavirus

Kenny MacAskill:

[43759]

To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what steps the Government is taking to support people with alcohol and other drug problems who have been newly housed in temporary accommodation under the emergency housing measures in response to covid-19; and what plans his Department has to manage this group when the lockdown is eased and lifted.

Luke Hall:

Over 90 per cent of those on the streets at the beginning of the crisis known to local authorities have now been made offers of safe accommodation. We know that this includes people with substance misuse and mental health needs.

Local authorities are responsible for assessing local need and commissioning alcohol and drug services and this includes providing services for people who have been

supported into emergency accommodation sites. Most local authorities are using their existing locally commissioned drug and alcohol treatment services to provide this support, including harm reduction, prescribing services and managing related health issues like alcohol withdrawal. They are also drawing on wider NHS services to provide mental and physical health support.

The Government recognises the significant steps local authorities have taken to deliver this work. On top of the initial £3.2 million to support rough sleepers, the Government has now announced £3.2 billion in funding for local authorities to help them meet the pressures caused by COVID-19 and to support vulnerable people, which can be used to provide drug and alcohol services.

In addition, and backed by funding from MHCLG through the 2020/21 Rough Sleeping programme, a pan-London substance misuse team has been commissioned by the City of London on behalf of the Greater London Authority to provide additional drug and alcohol treatment support in the hotels. This supplements local authority-level responses from alcohol and drug treatment. We are also working closely with local authorities, accommodation and support providers to ensure that they have guidance on how best to support people.

Public Health England (PHE) has published guidance to assist commissioners, managers and staff in addressing coronavirus and associated disease (COVID-19), in drug and alcohol services, which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-commissioners-and-providers-of-services-for-people-who-use-drugs-or-alcohol>

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

■ Migrant Camps: Coronavirus

Rachael Maskell:

[43696]

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what discussions she has had with (a) Cabinet colleagues and (b) international partners on protecting refugees in UNHCR camps and other camps during the covid-19 pandemic.

James Cleverly:

The UK has committed £744 million in the international fight against COVID-19. We are a key contributor to the UN Global Humanitarian Response Plan which aims to support the most vulnerable groups including refugees and other forcibly displaced populations.

The Secretary of State regularly engages with Cabinet colleagues on a wide range of matters including COVID-19 and its impact on developing countries.

The UK is taking decisive and co-ordinated action to support the global response to COVID-19, working with our international partners. The UK is also using its membership of the G7 and G20 to urge collective action and help drive a timely and

effective international response that ensures the most vulnerable groups, including refugees, are not left behind.

Our most recent funding includes new support to the UN's Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and other partners to help install hand-washing stations and isolation and treatment centres in refugee camps, support vulnerable displaced families, provide protection and education services for forcibly displaced children, and increase access to clean water for displaced people living in areas of armed conflict.

■ UK-Africa Investment Summit

Mr Richard Holden:

[\[44058\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what the cost to the public purse was of the UK Africa Investment Summit held on 20 January 2020; and if he will make a statement.

James Duddridge:

I can report that the final cost of the UK Africa Investment Summit held on 20 January was £3.14 million. Of this, 83% (£2.62 million) was ODA and 17% (£0.52 million) was non-ODA. This event delivered over £6.5 billion worth of commercial investments in infrastructure, energy, retail and tech; and the Government announced over £1.5 billion of UK aid-funded initiatives that are expected to create hundreds of thousands of jobs and mobilise over £2.4 billion of additional private investment for the continent.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ Trade Agreements: Japan

Bill Esterson:

[\[42995\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, what representations she has received from the automotive industry on potential changes to the UK's international trade agreement with Japan.

Greg Hands:

The UK and Japan have agreed to negotiate an enhanced bilateral agreement using the existing Economic Partnership Agreement as a basis.

Last year we ran a Call for Input to inform our approach to our future trade relationship with Japan. We received responses from a wide range of sectors, including the automotive industry.

The Automotive Expert Trade Advisory Group facilitates expert technical policy exchanges with relevant experts from academia, regulation and business.

In addition to the above formal structures we will continue to use a variety of mechanisms and engagement structures to ensure that our trade policy works for the whole of the UK.

JUSTICE

■ Legal Aid Scheme

Mr David Lammy: [\[42892\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many applications have been made for legal aid to the Legal Aid Agency in each of the last 12 months; and what proportion of those applications were successful.

Mr David Lammy: [\[42893\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many times the Legal Aid Agency has assessed that legal aid has been overpaid to a provider in each of the last 12 months.

Mr David Lammy: [\[42894\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many times the Legal Aid Agency has been successful in seeking repayment of overpaid legal aid to a provider in each of the last 12 months.

Mr David Lammy: [\[42895\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many (a) chambers and (b) solicitors firms are registered as practising solely in criminal legal aid.

Alex Chalk:

Applications for civil legal aid, January – December 2019

MONTH	APPLICATIONS VOLUMES	APPLICATIONS SUCCESSFUL	PROPORTION SUCCESSFUL (%)
Jan-2019	9,710	9,011	93%
Feb-2019	9,441	8,736	93%
Mar-2019	10,573	9,822	93%
Apr-2019	9,919	9,185	93%
May-2019	10,577	9,807	93%
Jun-2019	9,652	8,994	93%
Jul-2019	11,337	10,548	93%
Aug-2019	9,861	9,181	93%
Sep-2019	9,762	9,079	93%
Oct-2019	11,341	10,523	93%
Nov-2019	10,262	9,518	93%
Dec-2019	8,615	8,033	93%

Applications for criminal legal aid, January – December 2019

MONTH	VOLUME OF APPLICATIONS	VOLUME GRANTED	PROPORTION SUCCESSFUL (%)
Jan	28,209	27,174	96%
Feb	24,337	23,450	96%
Mar	26,075	25,215	97%
Apr	24,309	23,511	97%
May	26,705	25,765	96%
Jun	24,147	23,306	97%
Jul	27,035	26,188	97%
Aug	23,920	23,191	97%
Sep	23,633	22,901	97%
Oct	26,325	25,556	97%
Nov	23,923	23,153	97%
Dec	20,781	20,119	97%

Note: some applications classed as 'unsuccessful' may have been rejected for administrative reasons, as opposed to being refused for not meeting relevant eligibility criteria. An application may be refused due to a lack of merit in the case and/or the applicant not qualifying for public funding financially.

Identification and recovery of overpayments to providers, January – December 2019:

	No. OF PAYMENT ERRORS	% OF OVERALL CLAIMS WHERE ERROR FOUND	No. OF RECOVERIES	% OF ERRORS WHERE RECOVERY MADE	% OF £ PAID IN ERROR RECOVERED
Jan-19	1,631	1.37%	1611	98.77%	99.72%
Feb-19	1,263	1.00%	1244	98.50%	99.64%
Mar-19	1,307	1.02%	1291	98.78%	99.69%
Apr-19	1,186	0.82%	1167	98.40%	98.62%

	NO. OF PAYMENT ERRORS	% OF OVERALL CLAIMS WHERE ERROR FOUND	NO. OF RECOVERIES	% OF ERRORS WHERE RECOVERY MADE	% OF £ PAID IN ERROR RECOVERED
May-19	737	0.49%	721	97.83%	98.52%
Jun-19	1,077	0.74%	1059	98.33%	99.21%
Jul-19	748	0.50%	733	97.99%	99.57%
Aug-19	574	0.39%	553	96.34%	99.59%
Sep-19	1047	0.75%	1026	97.99%	99.20%
Oct-19	1,539	1.02%	1519	98.70%	99.83%
Nov-19	845	0.56%	818	96.80%	99.42%
Dec-19	993	0.72%	977	98.39%	99.63%

These figures refer to errors concerning either the submission or assessment of claims.

A list of all legal aid providers holding a contract to deliver services can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/directory-of-legal-aid-providers>. This can be filtered to show those providers holding a criminal legal aid contract only.

Whilst we hold robust data for individual self-employed advocates, they are generally paid directly by the Legal Aid Agency via their own individual legal aid account number, rather than via any chambers they may be tenanted at. Self-employed advocates also receive their instructions from the contract-holding solicitor with conduct of the matter, rather than via a contract with the Legal Aid Agency.

■ Offenders: Females

Ms Lyn Brown:

[42961]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent progress his Department has made on the implementation of the Female Offender Strategy.

Lucy Frazer:

The Female Offender Strategy (2018) set out our vision to see fewer women entering the justice system and reoffending; fewer women in custody, particularly on short custodial sentences, with more managed successfully in the community; and a custodial environment that enables rehabilitation. The strategy launched an ambitious programme of work to improve outcomes for female offenders and make society safer by tackling the underlying causes of offending and reoffending. This will take several years to deliver.

Almost two years on from publication of the Strategy we are making good progress. We have invested £5.1 million Strategy funding in 30 different women's services across England and Wales, helping to sustain and enhance existing services, fill gaps in provision, and provide properties for new women's centres. Other achievements include publication of a new Women's Policy Framework; roll-out of new training for staff working with women in custody and the community; improvements to the preparation of pre-sentence reports; publication and ongoing implementation of the recommendations in Lord Farmer's review into family ties for female offenders; undertaken a review of police forces' responses to our guidance on working with vulnerable women; piloting a new offender management model for women under supervision in the community; commissioning research to inform our policy on BAME female offenders; and a review of the operational policy on Pregnancy, Mother and Baby Units, and Mothers separated from children under the age of 2 in prison which is due to report shortly.

On 5 May 2020, we announced the investment of a further £2.5m in women's community services in England and Wales in 2020/21, supporting them to tackle the root causes of offending and help women to turn their lives around. We also announced that the first site of our residential women's centre pilot will be located in Wales. This will provide accommodation for vulnerable women with complex needs who would otherwise be sentenced to custody, enabling them to stay closer to home and maintain important family ties, and will directly tackle the issues which often underlie offending, like substance misuse and mental health. We will now work with Welsh Government and partners in Wales to identify a provider and site, with the aim of opening the centre by the end of next year.

■ Powers of Attorney: Coronavirus

Dan Jarvis:

[43930]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the length of time taken to process an application for Lasting Power of Attorney; and what steps his Department is taking to allocate additional resources to processing those applications during the covid-19 outbreak.

Alex Chalk:

The Office of the Public Guardian (OPG) aims to register Lasting Powers of Attorney (LPAs) in 40 working days (this includes a statutory 4-week waiting period). OPG has seen an impact on the time taken to process an LPA since COVID-19 began affecting circumstances. As of 07/05/2020 the average time taken to process and dispatch an LPA was 45 days against the target of 40 days. As a comparison, the March average came in at 34 days, and the average of 40 days was achieved in 2019/20. LPAs are paper documents that require a physical staff presence in an office to process and register, therefore these elements of the registration process have been affected by the need to maintain social distancing measures. Additionally, the staff numbers that are available to attend the office to carry out the physical activities are significantly reduced due to COVID-19 reasons (including shielding themselves and others).

OPG have introduced several new measures with the aim of mitigating the impacts of COVID-19 and social distancing on the time taken to register LPAs including:

- Overtime targeted to where there are blockages within the registration system because of a requirement for staff to be physically present in the office – this is starting to prove highly effective
- Introducing a new process where customer payments are taken over the phone
- Contacting customers using digital means such as email and text
- Identifying a new offsite print and post solution, meaning staff aren't required to be in the office to post letters to customers

In recent weeks ,OPG has produced guidance to help people make and use LPAs during the coronavirus outbreak. These are available on

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-office-of-the-public-guardian-response>.

This guidance provides clarity on how to make an LPA while observing social distancing and responds to common concerns around acting as an attorney during this time. The guidance also includes options which may be useful to help individuals plan for the immediate-term. These relate to health, welfare and financial decisions.

■ **Prison Officers: Coronavirus**

Ms Lyn Brown:

[42964]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what level of financial bonus each band of prison officer is entitled to receive under the Payment Plus Bonus Scheme during the covid-19 outbreak; and if he will make a statement.

Lucy Frazer:

I am very grateful for the work of prison staff who continue to provide a vital public service despite the challenging circumstances.

Subject to availability of hours to be worked, prison officers of all Bands are eligible to receive a bonus of £500 upon completion of 9 committed additional hours each week for 4 weeks, or £1,750 for completion of 108 committed additional hours over 12 weeks.

■ **Prisoners' Release: Coronavirus**

Mr David Lammy:

[42887]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what new contracts have been signed to deliver additional electronic tagging capacity for the temporary release scheme during the covid-19 outbreak.

Lucy Frazer:

We have been working with our existing suppliers to ensure we have the equipment required for the End of Custody Temporary Release (ECTR) scheme and have also signed two new contracts to deliver additional electronic tagging capacity.

An agreement was signed on 7th April 2020 with Buddi Ltd and on 22nd April 2020 with Attenti EM UK to provide 2000 electronic monitoring tags between them.

Both contracts are for 6 months duration with the provision to extend by a further 18 months if required. The services of these suppliers were contracted using the government's existing Digital Marketplace G-Cloud framework and both have extensive UK and international experience in providing electronic monitoring technology.

We are considering alternative uses for tags not required for the ECTR scheme.

■ Prisoners: Coronavirus

Mr David Lammy: [\[42884\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the ethnic background is of prisoners who have (a) tested positive for covid-19 and (b) died due to covid-19.

Mr David Lammy: [\[42885\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the ethnic background is of (a) prison and (b) probation staff who have (i) tested positive for covid-19 and (b) died due to covid-19.

Lucy Frazer:

The Ministry of Justice is following Public Health England (PHE) advice on the shielding of vulnerable staff members and service-users. We are currently considering the risk posed to staff and service-users from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds as part of our steadfast commitment to safety, as well as our duty of care to our staff and those in our custody.

We do collect data on the ethnic background of prisoners who have a) tested positive for COVID-19 and (b) died due to COVID-19. We also collect data on prison and probation staff who have died due to COVID-19, though this does not include contractors other than employees of private prisons.

The Ministry of Justice recognises the need to capture ethnicity data and has built this into elements of the current reporting requirements. While we do collect self-reported test results from staff members, we are still in the process of linking this data to our HR records in order to assess it by protected characteristics, including ethnicity. The Ministry of Justice will continue to review COVID-19 data collection and how it can be built on and refined in line with General Data Protection Regulation and data protection legislation.

The data in the table below is correct as of 5pm on Tuesday, 12 May.

	ETHNIC BACKGROUND	PRISONERS STAFF	
		Deaths	Confirmed Deaths Cases
Prison	Probation		

	ETHNIC BACKGROUND	PRISONERS	STAFF
White British	314	19 N/K	41
Black British	33	1 N/K	30
Asian/Asian British	35	1 N/K	00
Mixed/other/unrecorded	22	0 N/K	03*
Total	404	21 N/K	74

*Agency staff information not available.

Ms Lyn Brown:

[\[42963\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many and what proportion of prisoners who have displayed symptoms of covid-19 have been (a) isolated and (b) tested for the disease; and if he will make a statement.

Lucy Frazer:

One of the range of measures HMPPS is taking to limit the spread of the virus in prisons and save lives is to compartmentalise prisoners. This requires establishments to introduce isolation units (for the symptomatic), shielding units (for the vulnerable), and reverse cohorting units (to quarantine new arrivals).

All symptomatic prisoners are advised to isolate; as of Friday, 1 May we had 2,951 prisoners who were or are currently displaying symptoms and of these symptomatic prisoners we have tested 1,100 (37%) of them. We have counted those as tested if they have a positive or negative result recorded or are awaiting results.

The decision on whether to place an individual in an isolation unit is solely a clinical one, based on an assessment of symptoms. Having 'flu-like' symptoms alone is not necessarily enough to be placed on an isolation unit.

■ Prisoners: Death

Mr David Lammy:

[\[42881\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many (a) men and (b) women in prison have died from natural causes that may have been exacerbated by contracting covid-19.

Mr David Lammy:

[\[42882\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many (a) men and (b) women under probation supervision have died from natural causes that may have been exacerbated by contracting covid-19.

Lucy Frazer:

We are working hard to contain the spread of COVID-19 in the prison system as part of the national plan to protect the NHS and save lives. In our prisons and in the

community, we are implementing a range of measures to reduce the spread of the transmission of the virus and the numbers of lives sadly lost.

As of 5pm on Tuesday, 12 May, we are aware of 19 men and 2 women in prison and 8 men and 2 women under probation supervision who have died from natural causes that may have been exacerbated by contracting COVID-19.

■ Prisoners: Self-harm

Mr David Lammy:

[42879]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many instances of self-harm by prisoners have been recorded in (a) February, (b) March and (c) April 2020.

Lucy Frazer:

Data about self-harm in prisons in England and Wales is published quarterly. The most recent figures, up to December 2019, can be viewed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/safety-in-custody-quarterly-update-to-december-2019>. Figures for January to March 2020 will be published on 30 July, and figures for April to June on 29 October.

Self-harm remains a huge concern. This is why we must continue to make prisons safer and ensure prisoners can access the support they need.

We have refreshed our partnership with the Samaritans by awarding a grant of £500,000 each year until 2021. This supports the specialist Listeners scheme, through which selected prisoners are trained to provide emotional support to their fellow prisoners.

We are also improving the effectiveness of the Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork procedures to better support those at risk of harming themselves.

■ Prisoners: Suicide

Mr David Lammy:

[42880]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many (a) men and (b) women in prison have died by suicide in (i) January, (ii) February, (iii) March and (iv) April 2020.

Lucy Frazer:

The numbers of self-inflicted deaths in the first three months of 2020 are set out below. Figures for April 2020 are not available yet; they will be published on 30 July.

	MEN	WOMEN
January 2020	6	0
February 2020	3	0
March 2020	4	0

These figures are provisional. Other deaths where we are awaiting further information may later be classified as self-inflicted.

Too many prisoners are taking their own lives. That is one of the reasons we introduced the key worker scheme in 2018, supported by the recruitment of extra prison officers, so that every offender can get dedicated support and have someone to talk to.

We have given over 25,000 staff better training to identify and support those at risk of suicide and self-harm, and we are improving the effectiveness of the Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork process to support those at risk. We are also investing an extra £2.75 billion to modernise prisons, combat drug use and improve the environment in which offenders live.

■ Prisons: Coronavirus

Mr David Lammy:

[\[42883\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, how many (a) prisoners and (b) prison staff have been tested for covid-19 to date.

Lucy Frazer:

On 24 April, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, announced the rollout of COVID-19 testing for all essential workers and symptomatic members of their household, including prison staff, those working in Approved Premises (APs) and probation staff (including private sector service providers) in England. We have referred over 3,000 HMPPS staff for testing to date.

In Wales, testing for prison, AP and probation staff and symptomatic members of their household is being delivered through local resilience forum arrangements and through Local Health Boards.

For prisoners, tests will be conducted on symptomatic prisoners on site. The testing capacity and availability can vary between establishments, depending on local circumstances at the time.

Ms Lyn Brown:

[\[42965\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what recent estimate he has made of the number and proportion of pregnant prison staff by each grade who are (a) working from home, (b) furloughed and (c) attending the workplace during the covid-19 outbreak; and if he will make a statement.

Lucy Frazer:

Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) follows the Government and the Civil Service HR advice, that pregnant women are treated as those in the increased risk group apart from pregnant women with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired who are treated as part of the extremely vulnerable group. For those in the extremely vulnerable group we advise shielding, they should work from home if possible and if not possible they should be on paid special leave. For other pregnant women, we are conducting risk assessments to determine what

adjustments should be made to make the workplace as safe as possible. Pregnant staff should not be working in prisoner facing roles at this time and may request to work remotely from their workplace during this period.

Furthermore, pregnant women over 28 weeks' gestation should also follow a similar approach to shielding. This was based on information from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) which is referenced on Gov.uk as the advice for 'guidance on pregnancy and the coronavirus'.

HMPPS does not hold the data requested.

Ms Lyn Brown:

[42966]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, whether HM Prison & Probation Service plans to seek agreement with staff trades unions in advance of taking a decision to relax prison measures adopted in response to the covid-19 outbreak.

Lucy Frazer:

Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service continues to work collaboratively with our recognised staff trade unions throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, to ensure all staff and prisoners are kept as safe as they possibly can be. We have proactively engaged with the unions in developing suitable operational guidance and arrangements to support staff in this period. This constructive joint approach will continue as we develop our medium-term recovery plans. We are very grateful to them for their cooperation during this time, and look forward to continuing to work collaboratively in the weeks and months ahead.

■ Prisons: Females

Ms Lyn Brown:

[42962]

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, with reference to the 2017 review by Lord Farmer entitled Importance of strengthening prisoners' family ties to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime, whether there are any women's prisons that do not have in-cell telephones.

Lucy Frazer:

The 2017 Lord Farmer review, and his further Review for Women (2019) identified a series of recommendations on how to support both men and women in prison to engage with their families and the impact this can have in reducing reoffending and assisting in addressing the intergenerational transmission of crime.

In line with Lord Farmer's recommendations, we will aim to prioritise women, the youth estate and vulnerable prisoners where possible with regard to the implementation of technology across the prison estate.

Currently all female prisons with the exception of four (Downview, Send, Low Newton and Drake Hall) have in-cell telephones. It is planned that these remaining four prisons will have received the technology within the next 6-8 months. We are working closely with third parties to identify whether the impact of Covid-19 will impact our proposed timing.

In recognition of the importance of continued contact with family and to ensure stability in our jails, in the current state of pandemic, the Government has moved quickly to keep prisoners in touch with their family members by the introduction of 900 secure mobile PIN phones for those prisons which do not already have in-cell telephony. These are in addition to, but operate in the same way, as wing PIN phones which remain in use.

■ Probation: Coronavirus

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[42967\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the ability of probation staff to maintain social distancing while working in approved premises during the covid-19 outbreak.

Lucy Frazer:

As you would expect, offenders in Approved Premises (APs) are following the same guidance as other members of the public on social distancing.

Social distancing advice has been disseminated to all AP staff which is based on guidance from Public Health England.

Our staff have been provided with personal protective equipment and extra cleaning products to help keep Approved Premises clean.

We have also provided APs with digital thermometers, explained to staff how self-isolation would work in this setting and provided staff with guidance on how to keep residents psychologically positive and occupied to reduce the risk of self-harm.

AP senior leaders continue to liaise regularly with health and safety colleagues and Trade Unions to ensure staff safety.

■ Remand in Custody

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[42957\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what was the (a) mean and (b) median number of days (i) women and (ii) men spent remanded in custody in each of the last five years.

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[42958\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what was the (a) mean and (b) median number of days unconvicted (i) women and (ii) men spent remanded in custody in each of the last five years.

Ms Lyn Brown: [\[42959\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, if he will make an estimate of the (a) mean and (b) median number of days unconvicted (i) women and (ii) men spent remanded in custody during a trial process that ended without them being convicted in each of the last five years.

Lucy Frazer:

Centrally held court data does not include the amount of time spent remanded in custody, and therefore obtaining this information would result in a disproportionate cost to the department.

Prison receptions data has enabled an approximation of the data that has been requested. The attached tables provide information on the mean and median amount of time that men and women were remanded in custody up to the point that they were sentenced (Table 1), and remanded in custody pre-trial up to the point that they were admitted to prison between conviction and sentencing (Table 2), in each of the last five years. It has not been possible to estimate the mean and median amount of time that unconvicted men and women were remanded in custody during a trial process that resulted in no conviction because this specific data could only be obtained at a disproportionate cost to the department.

Attachments:

1. Table [20200506 PQ 42957 42958_final.xlsx]

■ Remand in Custody: Females**Ms Lyn Brown:**[\[42960\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment he has made of the reasons for the increase in the number of women held on remand in the year to March 2020.

Lucy Frazer:

The number of women in custody on remand has declined significantly over the past 15 years, having decreased from around 1,000 (as at June 2005) to 559 (as at March 2020).

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) includes a real prospect of custody test. This sets out that a court can only consider a remand in custody if the defendant, if convicted, would face a custodial sentence.

While there was an increase of 8% (520 to 559) in the number of women on remand in the year to March 2020, this figure is comparable with the 564 women on remand at 31 March 2018.

We are working on a number of areas for male and female offenders which should assist and support the courts in their decision-making. This includes the implementation of a national Bail Information Service as a priority service in those courts that remain open, which aims to ensure the identification of defendants who might be eligible for bail, and to provide sufficient information to the courts to enable them to make fully informed decisions in each individual case.

The National Probation Service has developed an Aide Memoire for use when court reports are being completed about women. The Aide Memoire for Reports on Women is designed to prompt probation officers writing presentence reports to consider all areas related to a woman's offending and to make a robust proposal for a community sentence whenever appropriate.

In addition, the Female Offender Strategy (2018), set out an ambitious programme of work to improve outcomes for female offenders at all stages of the justice system, and make society safer by tackling the underlying causes of offending and reoffending. This will take several years to deliver.

■ **Solicitors: Coronavirus**

Mr David Lammy: [\[42890\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what steps his Department has taken to identify the number of (a) chambers and (b) solicitors firms facing financial difficulties due to the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr David Lammy: [\[42891\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what assessment his Department has made of the potential number of (a) chambers and (b) solicitors firms that will cease trading in the next (i) six months and (ii) twelve months due to financial pressures caused by the covid-19 outbreak.

Alex Chalk:

We have maintained ongoing engagement with key representative bodies including the Law Society, Bar Council and other practitioner groups to identify the scale of the financial difficulties experienced across the legal services sector. This approach has enabled us to evaluate how the financial support from the Treasury is assisting the wider industry.

We have recently changed the rules around hardship payments, so that criminal legal aid practitioners can access payment for completed work sooner in a large number of additional cases, assisting the sector to continue operations during the crisis. We are also considering the wider issues relating to civil and criminal legal aid sustainability.

Our immediate priority is to enable workflow across the sector so that chambers and solicitors firms operate at increased capacity as soon as is practicable.

NORTHERN IRELAND

■ **[Subject Heading to be Assigned]**

Caroline Ansell: [\[902579\]](#)

What support his Department is providing to the health service in Northern Ireland during the covid-19 outbreak.

Mr Robin Walker:

The UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive are communicating at all levels, with the NI Health Minister regularly attending the Government's health meetings. So far £1.2bn has been made available to the Executive to support the response to Covid-19.

We will continue to support the Health Service in Northern Ireland in any way possible, such as the Government's UK-wide drive to increase testing and PPE supply. As part of this, we have rolled out three test facilities in Northern Ireland - Belfast, Londonderry, and Craigavon - for the testing of frontline and key workers.

Huw Merriman:

[\[902587\]](#)

What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the provision of abortion services in Northern Ireland.

Alex Davies-Jones:

[\[902590\]](#)

What assessment he has made of the adequacy of information for women seeking to access abortion services in Northern Ireland.

Mr Robin Walker:

Abortion services are now a matter for the Department of Health in Northern Ireland.

I am pleased that some service provision has commenced through existing sexual and reproductive health services in the Belfast, Northern and Western Trust areas. Information on these services is available through the Informing Choices NI helpline and the Central Booking Service.

I hope that longer-term services can be commissioned as soon as possible in the current circumstances, consistent with the Regulations we made.

The Abortion (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2020 which were laid in March have now been replaced with the Abortion (Northern Ireland) (No. 2) Regulations 2020, which were laid in the House today. These regulations come into effect on 14th May and revoke the earlier regulations. Their legal effect in supporting the provision of services remains consistent, with a small correction having been made to address the concerns of the JCSI, so services can continue on the same basis.

TRANSPORT

■ Aviation and Package Holidays: Coronavirus

Chris Elmore:

[\[43090\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to ensure travel operators are providing cash refunds for cancelled (a) flights and (b) package holidays.

Kelly Tolhurst:

The Government recognises the challenges businesses and consumers are experiencing regarding refunds for cancelled holidays and flights. Airlines are working hard to answer the high call volumes and to process the very large number of applications for refunds.

We appreciate the frustration consumers may be experiencing. We are clear that refunds must be paid when asked for by the consumer. The Department for Transport is in regular conversation with UK airlines and wider membership bodies. The

department is working closely with the sector, the regulator and consumer groups to help ensure airlines deliver on their commitments.

■ **Aviation: Coronavirus**

Mr Stephen Morgan:

[\[43153\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with representatives from the (a) Civil Aviation Authority and (b) Airlines UK on planning for an increase in international airline traffic once covid-19 lockdown are eased.

Kelly Tolhurst:

The aviation sector is important to the UK economy and the government recognises the challenging times it is facing as a result of COVID-19. Our transport systems are critical to support the restart of the wider economy and we are working closely with the aviation sector, including CAA and Airlines UK, on these restart plans and the longer-term recovery of the sector.

■ **East West Railway Company: Trains**

Daniel Zeichner:

[\[43044\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he had with the East-West Rail Company prior to their tender for diesel units; and what assessment he has made of the merits of that line being an electrified railway.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department is investing in transport infrastructure that meets the needs of people and businesses, and is driving forward the development of policy on the decarbonisation and sustainability of rail. The East West Rail Company is currently seeking to procure rolling stock on an interim basis to enable services to be delivered as soon as possible whilst ongoing discussions about the case and options for the electrification of the railway in the long term are concluded.

■ **Railways: Coronavirus**

Tom Tugendhat:

[\[43060\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many rail season ticket holders on the (a) Southeastern and (b) GTR Southern network have been unable to claim a refund for unused travel on their season tickets since his Department introduced the Emergency Measures Arrangements to support the rail sector.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The majority of rail season ticket holders (i.e. those with more than seven weeks remaining on their annual ticket) are able to claim a refund. Southeastern and GTR Southern introduced new processes to make claiming easier during COVID-19 travel restrictions, for example the ability for passengers to claim refunds remotely rather than returning their ticket to a ticket office. We have also allowed season ticket holders to backdate their claim to 17th March, when 'do not travel' advice was first introduced, and they now have up to 56 days to submit their claim.

The Department does not hold data on the number of season ticket holders who have been unable to claim a refund from Southeastern or GTR Southern since the introduction of the Emergency Measures Arrangements. This is because not all season ticket holders require a refund, as some still need to use their tickets to travel to work.

Suzanne Webb:

[\[43193\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the systems in place to refund rail season tickets.

Chris Heaton-Harris:

The Department and Transport Focus are in regular contact with the rail industry to monitor the effectiveness of the systems in place to refund rail season tickets. This has led to the introduction of new processes to make claiming refunds easier during this crisis.

Passengers are now able to claim refunds remotely and we have allowed passengers to backdate their season ticket refund claim to 17th March, when 'do not travel' advice was first introduced. The refund acceptance period for passengers has also been extended to 56 days, and a season ticket refund calculator has been added to National Rail's website.

Train operators have allocated additional resources to process the unprecedented number of refund requests as quickly as possible. Since 17th March over 85,000 season ticket holders have claimed season ticket refunds totalling over £130 million in response to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

■ Roads: Freight

Sir Mike Penning:

[\[42933\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what assessment he has made of the (a) level of late payments and non-payments for services provided in the road transport industry and (b) potential effect of those payments on the viability of haulage companies.

Sir Mike Penning:

[\[42943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate he has made of the proportion of trucks in the haulage industry that are idle as a result of the covid-19 pandemic.

Sir Mike Penning:

[\[42944\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what financial support his Department has made available to haulage companies whose vehicles are currently idle as a result of the covid-19 pandemic.

Sir Mike Penning:

[\[42945\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a financial support scheme for haulage businesses whose vehicles are idle during the covid-19 outbreak.

Rachel Maclean:

The Government has made available £330bn of support through loans and guarantees to support UK businesses. Changes have been made to some of the schemes to ensure that more businesses, particularly those that are SMEs like many road haulage companies, can benefit from them.

The Department is in regular contact with representatives of the road haulage industry to understand the issues that the industry is experiencing as a result of COVID-19. The Department recognises that the sector is going through a challenging time.

Engagement with the industry suggests that delays in payment from customers is an issue for some hauliers.

Engagement with the industry also indicates that some road haulage trucks have been taken off the road. Whilst there are no current plans to introduce a financial support scheme for haulage businesses whose vehicles are idle during the COVID-19 outbreak, we continue to keep this under review.

The Government will continue to gather evidence on the impacts of COVID-19 to establish whether any further support for the sector is needed.

TREASURY**■ Agriculture: Government Assistance****Bell Ribeiro-Addy:**[\[43756\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps his Department is taking to include agricultural businesses in the support packages introduced by the Government.

Steve Barclay:

The Government has announced unprecedented support for business and workers to protect them against the current economic emergency including an initial £330 billion of guarantees – equivalent to 15% of UK GDP.

On 6 May the Government announced a new fund which will enable eligible dairy farmers in England to access up to £10,000 each to help them overcome the impact of the coronavirus outbreak. This will cover 70% of their lost income during April and May to ensure they can continue to operate and sustain production capacity without impacts on animal welfare.

Businesses in the agricultural sector may benefit from the range of support measures made available, which includes:

- The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS)
- The Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBL) for small and micro enterprises
- The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS).
- VAT deferral for up to 12 months

- The Time To Pay scheme, through which businesses and self-employed individuals in financial distress, and with outstanding tax liabilities, can receive support with their tax affairs
- Protection for commercial leaseholders against automatic forfeiture for non-payment until June 30, 2020

The Business Support website provides further information about how businesses can access the support that has been made available, who is eligible, when the schemes open and how to apply - <https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support>.

■ Bounce Back Loan Scheme

Alec Shelbrooke:

[42992]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the Bounce Back Loan scheme will be made available to businesses that bank with Cash Plus and other online lenders and that cannot open new business accounts with high street lenders that have stopped accepting new customers.

John Glen:

The new Bounce Back Loans Scheme (BBLs), launched 4 May, will ensure that the smallest businesses can access up to £50,000 loans in a matter of just days.

There are over 16 lenders that are offering loans under the scheme which can be found here: <https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/ourpartners/coronavirus-business-interruption-loan-schemes/bounce-back-loans/current-accredited-lenders-and-partners/>

Any lender that wishes to become accredited to offer Bounce Back Loans should contact the British Business Bank.

■ Bureaux de Change: Non-domestic Rates

Sarah Olney:

[43112]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to extend business rates relief to bureaux de change businesses.

Sarah Olney:

[43113]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, for what reason bureaux de change businesses have been excluded from business rates relief.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has provided enhanced support to the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors through business rates relief given the direct and acute impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on those sectors.

Although financial services providers are not eligible for business rates relief, a range of further measures to support all businesses, including bureaux de change, has also been made available. These include the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to help

firms keep people in employment, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme offering loans of up to £5 million for SMEs through the British Business Bank, and the deferral of VAT payments for this quarter.

The Government will consider any further financial assistance necessary to support businesses during this period.

■ Carers: Coronavirus

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:

[\[43941\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether respite and day carers for children and adults that are unable to work as a result of the covid-19 outbreak are eligible for financial support from the Government.

Jesse Norman:

Individuals who are unable to work as a result of COVID-19 may have access to support through either the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) or the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS).

To be eligible for the CJRS, employees must have been on their employer's PAYE payroll on or before 19 March 2020 and HMRC must have received an RTI submission notifying payment in respect of that employee on or before 19 March 2020. Eligible employees can be on any type of employment contract, including full-time, part-time, agency, fixed-term, flexible or zero hour contracts.

The SEISS will allow eligible individuals to claim a taxable grant worth 80% of their average monthly trading profits, paid out in a single instalment covering three months, and capped at £7,500 in total. Self-employed individuals, including members of partnerships, are eligible if they have submitted their Income Tax Self-Assessment tax return for the tax year 2018-19, continued to trade, and have been adversely affected by COVID-19. To qualify, their self-employed trading profits must be less than £50,000, with more than half of their income deriving from self-employment. Some 95% of people who receive the majority of their income from self-employment could benefit from this scheme, based on 2017-18 data.

Those not eligible for these schemes may have access to other support Government is providing, including a package of temporary welfare measures and up to three months' mortgage payment holidays for those in difficulty with mortgage payments.

■ Child Benefit: Rother Valley

Alexander Stafford:

[\[43214\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many children there are in households to which the high income child benefit charge applies in Rother Valley constituency.

Jesse Norman:

The information requested is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

■ Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme

Robert Halfon:

[\[42990\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent discussions he has had with Cabinet colleagues on ensuring that the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme is reaching all those businesses that will benefit from that scheme.

John Glen:

The Government has set out an unprecedented package of support for all businesses affected by this crisis, including the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS).

As of 12 May, 36,000 facilities, with a value of over £6 billion, had been approved for SMEs through CBILS. The Government continues to monitor closely the impact of its policies and keeps all policies under review.

The Government has taken further action by launching the Bounce Back Loan Scheme to ensure that the smallest SMEs, who may have struggled to see their finance applications approved as quickly as they need, can access finance. Businesses can apply for a loan from £2,000 up to £50,000, capped at 25% of a firm's turnover. The Government will provide lenders with a 100% guarantee on each loan, to give lenders the confidence they need to support the smallest businesses in the country. The Government will cover the first 12 months of interest payments and fees charged to the business by the lender. The interest rate after the first 12-month period has been agreed between the Government and lenders at 2.5%. No early repayment fees will be charged to a borrower.

■ Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

Caroline Lucas:

[\[41021\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has made an assessment of the effect of the requirement that staff furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme not to undertake any work on (a) the ability of SMEs to carry out pay roll operations and (b) the long term prospects for businesses that are unable to reply to (i) enquiries from customers, (ii) requests and (iii) other inquiries during closure; and if he will make a statement.

Jesse Norman:

The purpose of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is to support people who would otherwise have been made redundant. To prevent fraudulent claims, the Government made it clear that individuals cannot work or volunteer for their organisation. This is to protect individuals too; if workers were allowed to volunteer for their employer, the employer could ask them to work in an effectively full time way while only paying them 80% of their wages. There is flexibility in the scheme; employers can decide how many staff to furlough, and while the minimum furlough duration is 3 weeks, employers may furlough staff multiple times while the scheme is in operation. This scheme supplements the other significant support announced for

UK businesses, including the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme and the deferral of tax payments.

More information about the full range of business support measures is available at www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support/.

Caroline Lucas: [41967]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he plans to introduce a tapered furlough scheme under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme for the (a) hospitality, (b) tourism and (c) others sectors of the economy that are most affected by social distancing; and if he will make a statement.

Grahame Morris: [41992]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will extend the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to include people employed in the aviation sector to the end of 2020.

Angela Crawley: [42104]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what steps he is taking to provide furlough payments under the Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme for the hospitality sector until social distancing measures allow them to safely reopen, and if he will make a statement.

Sir Mike Penning: [42935]

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on greater flexibility in the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme for industries where demand is unpredictable.

Sir Mike Penning: [42936]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits on introducing greater flexibility in the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme for industries where demand is unpredictable.

Sir Mike Penning: [42946]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits on introducing a monthly furlough scheme for businesses that have taken vehicles out of service as a result of the covid-19 pandemic.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has extended the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme until October 2020. Extending the scheme in its current form until July will provide workers, businesses and the economy with clarity on this vital support. After July, the Government will introduce more flexibility to the furlough scheme in a measured way that protects people's incomes and helps support furloughed employees as they return to work. From August through to the end of October, employers currently using the scheme will have more flexibility to bring their furloughed employees back to work part-time while still receiving support from the scheme. Employers using the scheme will start contributing some of the costs of their workers' salaries, substituting in part

the contribution that the Government is currently making. The Government will outline more details of how this will work by the end of May.

It is the case that some firms will be affected by coronavirus for longer than others, and the Government will seek to support these firms appropriately. It would be challenging to target the CJRS to specific sectors in a fair and deliverable way, and it may not be the case that this is the most effective or sensible way to provide longer term support for those sectors most affected by coronavirus.

The Government will continue to monitor developments and engage with affected sectors, with the aim of ensuring that support provided is right for these sectors and for the economy as a whole.

Kate Osamor:

[\[42142\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on ensuring that business owners with a UK payroll but have an immigration status condition of no recourse to public funds are not automatically excluded from accessing the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is open to any employer providing they have created and started a PAYE payroll scheme on or before 19 March 2020; enrolled for PAYE online; and have a UK bank account. Individuals on any type of employment contract can be furloughed providing they were employed on 19 March 2020 and were on the employer's payroll on or before 19 March 2020.

The assistance being given under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is not classed as public funds and is available to all those in work, including those with No Recourse to Public Funds status.

Sir Mike Penning:

[\[42937\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent assessment he has made of the level of need for an extension of the furlough period beyond its current end date.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has extended the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme until October 2020. Extending the scheme in its current form until July will provide workers, businesses and the economy with clarity on this vital support. After July, the Government will introduce more flexibility to the furlough scheme in a measured way that protects people's incomes and helps support furloughed employees as they return to work. From August through to the end of October, employers currently using the scheme will have more flexibility to bring their furloughed employees back to work part-time while still receiving support from the scheme. Employers using the scheme will start contributing some of the costs of their workers' salaries, substituting in part the contribution that the Government is currently making. The Government will outline more details of how this will work by the end of May.

Sir Mike Penning:

[42947]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will (a) change the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme 19 March cut-off date eligibility criterion from RTI submission date to contract start date and (b) set up an HMRC task force to examine evidence of contract start date on a case-by-case basis to prevent fraud.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has prioritised helping the greatest number of people as quickly as possible, and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) will enable millions of people to remain employed.

The Government set up the CJRS to operate at significant scale and with limited manual intervention. Processing claims for the CJRS in cases where HMRC did not have RTI data would require much greater manual handling by HMRC, which would significantly slow down the system. Extending the cut-off date beyond 20 March would significantly increase the risk of abuse because HMRC could not verify claims using data after this point.

The 19 March deadline date allows as many people as possible to be included by going right up to the day before the announcement, while addressing the risk of fraud that existed as soon as the scheme became public.

Rushanara Ali:

[43925]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if his Department will issue guidance to big businesses using the Job Retention Scheme to not issue large bonuses to their executives.

Jesse Norman:

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme is designed to help employers whose operations have been severely affected by coronavirus to retain their employees and protect the UK economy. All employers are eligible for the scheme and the Government recognises that different businesses will face different impacts from coronavirus.

To claim, employers must have created and started a PAYE payroll scheme on or before 19 March 2020; enrolled for PAYE online; and have a UK bank account. No other eligibility conditions apply. Full guidance can be found at:

www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme. Adding further restrictions would reduce the number of employees who would be eligible for this important financial support.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck:

[43940]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the number of employees that are eligible for furlough that have been made unemployed.

Jesse Norman:

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has so far protected over 7.5 million workers and almost 1 million businesses. While there is no obligation for employers to take up

the scheme, the Government encourages all firms affected by coronavirus to treat their employees fairly and carefully.

The Government is also supporting people on low incomes who may need to rely on the welfare system through a significant package of temporary measures. These include a £20 per week increase to the Universal Credit standard allowance and Working Tax Credit basic element, and a nearly £1bn increase in support for renters through increases to the Local Housing Allowance rates for Universal Credit and Housing Benefit claimants. These changes will benefit all new and existing claimants. Anyone can check their eligibility and apply for Universal Credit by visiting <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit>.

■ **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: Directors**

Emma Hardy:

[43141]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has under the conditions of entitlement to the furlough scheme to enable furloughed company directors to undertake actions necessary to return their company to work without being in breach of those conditions.

Jesse Norman:

As noted in the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme guidance, company directors are bound by the Companies Act 2006 to fulfil their statutory duties. The Government aims to ensure that salaried directors can be furloughed and supported through this scheme, while still being able to meet their statutory duties. The guidance is clear that furloughed directors should do no more work than would reasonably be judged necessary to meet their statutory requirements, and that they should not do work of a kind they would carry out in normal circumstances to generate commercial revenue or provide services to or on behalf of their company.

The Government has extended the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme until October 2020. Extending the scheme in its current form until July will provide workers, businesses and the economy with clarity on this vital support. After July, the Government will introduce more flexibility to the furlough scheme in a measured way that protects people's incomes and helps support furloughed employees as they return to work. From August through to the end of October, employers currently using the scheme will have more flexibility to bring their furloughed employees back to work part-time while still receiving support from the scheme. Employers using the scheme will start contributing some of the costs of their workers' salaries, substituting in part the contribution that the Government is currently making. The Government will outline more details of how this will work by the end of May.

This scheme supplements the other significant support announced for UK businesses, including the Bounce Back Loans Scheme for small businesses, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, and the deferral of tax payments. More information about the full range of business support measures is available at www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support/

■ Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: Public Sector

Bridget Phillipson:

[\[43889\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether public sector organisations are able to furlough former employees who left their employment on or after 28 February 2020 and who are unable to commence employment with their new employer due to the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

If an individual was made redundant or stopped working for their employer after 28 February, the employer can agree to re-employ that individual and place them on furlough.

In line with the private sector, public sector employers can re-employ an eligible individual, furlough them and access the CJRS, on condition that the individual is not already on furlough from another organisation; there are no options for the individual to be re-employed and redeployed elsewhere in the public sector; and the organisation has already met the eligibility criteria for publicly funded bodies to furlough staff.

The eligibility criteria for publicly funded bodies to furlough staff are that the organisation has experienced a reduction in funding (in the form of commercial revenue or public grants) due to the economic disruption of COVID-19; the organisation has exhausted all reasonable options for redeployment across the public sector; and the employee considered for furloughing would otherwise be made redundant.

The employer is under no obligation to re-employ and furlough staff.

■ Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: Supply Teachers

Carla Lockhart:

[\[43208\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of making substitute teachers eligible to benefit from the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Jesse Norman:

Employees on any type of employment contract, including full-time, part-time, agency, flexible and zero-hour contracts are eligible for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme providing they were employed on 19 March 2020 and were on their employer's PAYE payroll on or before 19 March 2020. Fixed term employees can also be claimed for, and if their contract has not already expired it can be extended or renewed.

The scheme is designed to protect jobs and support as many people as possible quickly while mitigating the risk of fraud.

The Government is supporting people on low incomes who may need to rely on the welfare system through a significant package of temporary measures. This includes a £20 per week increase to the Universal Credit standard allowance and Working Tax

Credit basic element, and a nearly £1bn increase in support for renters through increases to the Local Housing Allowance rates for Universal Credit and Housing Benefit claimants. These changes will benefit all new and existing claimants.

■ **Entertainments: Coronavirus**

Dr James Davies:

[\[43987\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential long-term economic effect of the covid-19 outbreak on the live entertainment industry.

Kemi Badenoch:

We will continue to monitor developments to understand the economic impacts of COVID-19, including on industries and sectors, and consider how the Government can best support their recovery, including that of the live entertainment industry.

The Government's economic strategy will be closely coordinated with our public health strategy to ensure a safe return to economic activity.

Like many other sectors, the live entertainment industry has been severely impacted by COVID-19, which is why the Government has put in place an unprecedented level of support for business and workers, including:

- A 12-month business rates holiday for all eligible retail, leisure and hospitality businesses in England
- The Retail, Leisure and Hospitality Grant Fund (RLHGF)
- The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)
- The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)
- The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS)
- The Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CLBILS)
- The Bounce Back Loan Scheme (BBL) for small and micro enterprises
- VAT deferral for up to 12 months
- The Time To Pay scheme, through which businesses and self-employed individuals in financial distress, and with outstanding tax liabilities, can receive support with their tax affairs
- Protection for commercial leaseholders against automatic forfeiture for non-payment until June 30, 2020

■ **European Union Solidarity Fund: Coronavirus**

Hilary Benn:

[\[42903\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the EU Solidarity Fund has made any payments to member states in response to the covid-19 pandemic; and whether the Government has applied for assistance from that fund.

Steve Barclay:

The Government's priority is to save lives and we are working with a range of international partners, including the EU, to that end. We are supporting the EU's efforts to tackle the outbreak and fulfilling our obligations through the Financial Settlement.

The EU have not yet budgeted payments from the Solidarity Fund to Member States in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Applications for funding through the fund are open until late June and the applications will be assessed after the deadline. Therefore, it is unlikely that payments will be made till the summer.

The Government is considering the EU's new use of the EU Solidarity Fund, and our decision to participate in any cooperation efforts or schemes with the European Commission, and other European and international partners, will always be made on the basis of public health requirements at the time.

■ Maternity Pay: Coronavirus**Mhairi Black:**[\[43681\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of extending maternity pay for people affected by the covid-19 outbreak.

Steve Barclay:

The Government has committed to a targeted, multi-billion-pound package of unprecedented support for individuals, families and businesses affected by the virus, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

We have taken steps to ensure that furloughed workers who are planning on taking family-related leave, including Maternity Leave, on or after 25 April, will be entitled to pay based on their usual earnings rather than their furloughed pay rate. In addition, where employers 'top-up' statutory pay on a contractual basis, they will be able to claim for these payments through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme for furloughed workers.

The Government has prioritised measures which are targeted towards the most vulnerable and can be delivered safely and swiftly. The UK has one of the most generous periods of Maternity Leave in the world; mothers can already choose to take up to 12 months leave, 39 weeks of which are paid. Therefore the Government currently has no further plans to extend family-related leave and pay.

■ Off-payroll Working**Sammy Wilson:**[\[42972\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to delay his Department's policy of extending the roll-out of off-payroll rules.

Jesse Norman:

The Government recently announced that the reform to the off-payroll working rules for people contracting their services to large or medium-sized organisations outside the public sector will be delayed for one year, from 6 April 2020 until 6 April 2021.

This is part of the additional support which the Government is providing for businesses and individuals to deal with the economic impacts of COVID-19. It is right for the Government to do what it can to support all parts of the labour market at this time.

This is a deferral of the introduction of the reform, not a cancellation. The Government remains committed to introducing this policy in order to address the unfairness of non-compliance with the existing off-payroll working rules. The Government will reintroduce the off-payroll working rules provisions by amending the Finance Bill, with a commencement date of 6 April 2021.

Sammy Wilson:**[42973]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the cost to businesses of extending the roll-out of pay-roll tax rules to the private sector.

Jesse Norman:

The off-payroll working rules are designed to ensure that someone working like an employee, but through their own company, pays similar levels of tax to other employees. It is fair that individuals who work in a similar way should pay broadly the same amount of tax.

The Tax Information and Impact Note (TIIN) published in July 2019 sets out HMRC's estimated one-off impact on administrative burden for businesses of £14.4 million.

The TIIN can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rules-for-off-payroll-working-from-april-2020/rules-for-off-payroll-working-from-april-2020>.

HMRC also provided written evidence on the administrative burden for businesses to the House of Lords Economic Affairs Finance Bill Sub-Committee, along with a commitment to review the methodology used to estimate the impact. This evidence can be found here: <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/29/draft-finance-bill-2019/publications/>.

■ Revenue and Customs: Coronavirus**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:****[43059]**

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will publish a list of the investigations by HMRC that have been suspended as a result of the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

It would not be appropriate for HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) to publish detailed information about their operational response during the COVID-19 outbreak. However, HMRC have made clear that they will support legitimate businesses and individuals, while taking tough action against serious criminal activity and those promoting avoidance schemes.

It is right that HMRC does everything possible to protect individuals, businesses and the economy during this difficult time. That includes prioritising work to support businesses and individuals.

■ **Roads: Freight**

Sir Mike Penning: [\[42941\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what recent assessment he has made of the effect of business rates on the financial sustainability of haulage companies during the covid-19 pandemic.

Sir Mike Penning: [\[42942\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of extending business rates relief to haulage companies during the covid-19 pandemic.

Jesse Norman:

The Government has provided enhanced support to the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors in England through business rates relief given the direct and acute impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on those sectors.

A range of further measures to support all businesses, including those not eligible for the business rates holiday, such as haulage companies, has also been made available. For example, the Government has launched the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to help firms keep people in employment, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme offering loans of up to £5 million for SMEs through the British Business Bank backed by an 80% Government guarantee, and is deferring VAT payments for this quarter.

The Government is monitoring the sectoral impacts of COVID-19, and keeps all support under review.

■ **Self-employment Income Support Scheme: Legal Profession**

Mr David Lammy: [\[42888\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how many (a) barristers and (b) solicitors have made applications to the Self-employment Income Support Scheme during the covid-19 outbreak; and how many of those applications have been accepted.

Jesse Norman:

The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme claims service opened on 13 May 2020, ahead of schedule. At this time no such information is available.

Mr David Lammy: [\[42889\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much has been received by (a) barristers and (b) solicitors through the self-employment Income Support Scheme due to the covid-19 outbreak to date.

Jesse Norman:

The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme claims service opened on 13 May 2020, ahead of schedule. At this time there have been no payments made.

■ Small Businesses: Non-domestic Rates**Scott Benton:**[\[43188\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of a business rates freeze for small retail, tourism and leisure commercial units which are currently unoccupied.

Jesse Norman:

The Government maintains empty property relief to support property owners between the reoccupation of vacated premises. Under empty property relief, owners of properties do not normally have to pay business rates on newly vacated buildings for three months. Certain properties are also eligible for extended empty property relief.

Properties which have closed temporarily due to the Government's advice on COVID-19 should be treated as occupied for the purposes of the business rates holiday for retail, hospitality and leisure properties.

A range of further measures to support all businesses, including those not eligible for the business rates holiday, has also been made available.

■ Social Enterprises: Loans**Caroline Lucas:**[\[42981\]](#)

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will permit social impact financiers to provide fast, low interest loans under the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme to (a) co-operatives, (b) mutual societies and (c) other social enterprises; and if he will make a statement.

John Glen:

The Government has set out an unprecedented package of support for all businesses affected by this crisis, including the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS).

On 3 April the Chancellor extended the eligibility of the scheme so that all viable small and medium-sized businesses affected by Covid-19, and not just those viable businesses unable to secure regular commercial financing, are now eligible to borrow under CBILS.

Businesses can access loans from £50,001 up to £5 million and the Government will cover the first 12 months' interest payments and any fees. The interest rate charged on finance facilities will be set at the discretion of each lender. The Government expects that these rates will be competitive and fairly priced, taking into account the unprecedented situation businesses may currently face. All lenders must clearly explain the interest and fees that they will charge over the duration of the facility.

Co-operatives and other mutuals are eligible to borrow under CBILS, provided they meet the wider scheme eligibility criteria. The Government recognises the value of co-operatives, and officials will continue to engage with sector representatives to understand the impact of the disruption caused by COVID-19.

Any lender, including social impact financiers, who wish to become accredited should contact the BBB.

As of 13 May, there are 68 accredited lenders participating in CBILS, and this list can be found on the British Business Bank's website: <https://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/ourpartners/coronavirus-business-interruption-loan-scheme-cbils-2/current-accredited-lenders-and-partners/>.

■ Stamp Duties: Coronavirus

Stephen Farry: [43206]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to increase the threshold for stamp duty to help support the property market during the covid-19 outbreak.

Jesse Norman:

There are no plans to change the Stamp Duty Land Tax threshold. However, the Government continues to keep all taxes under constant review as part of the response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

■ Tax Avoidance: Rother Valley

Alexander Stafford: [43209]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the number of people that will be made bankrupt in Rother Valley constituency as a result of accelerated payment notices in respect of the 2019 Loan Charge.

Alexander Stafford: [43210]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what estimate he has made of the number of people in Rother Valley constituency that will be affected by the 2019 Loan Charge after the Government has implemented recommendations of Sir Amyas Morse's review of that charge.

Jesse Norman:

I refer the Honourable Member to the responses of 18 March 2020 to UIN 27532 and 27533.

■ Zoos Support Fund

Douglas Chapman: [43677]

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what the Barnett consequential are for each of the devolved nations from the Zoo Support Fund.

Steve Barclay:

The UK government is applying the Barnett formula in the normal way to the additional funding for charities announced by the Chancellor. In relation to the £750 million package, the Scottish Government are receiving at least £55 million, the Welsh Government are receiving at least £32 million, and the Northern Ireland Executive are receiving at least £19m.

Funding for charities is a devolved matter and it is for the devolved administrations to decide how to support charities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

WORK AND PENSIONS**■ Department for Work and Pensions: Staff****Kate Osamor:**[\[43085\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many full-time equivalent staff were employed by her Department as decision makers with responsibility for making decisions on mandatory reconsideration requests for (a) employment support allowance, (b) personal independence payment and (c) universal credit claims on (i) 31 December 2018 and (ii) 31 December 2019.

Justin Tomlinson:

The full-time equivalent (FTE) information below refers to Decision Makers (EOs) and does not include any associated AO administration activities.

December 2018:

ESA MRs 180.70 FTE

PIP MRs 485.80 FTE

UC MRs 55.40 FTE

TOTAL 721.90 FTE

December 2019:

ESA MRs 115.86 FTE

PIP MRs 510.68 FTE

UC MRs 289.14 FTE

TOTAL: 915.47 FTE

■ Industrial Health and Safety: Coronavirus**Rachael Maskell:**[\[43982\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps she is taking to help ensure the health and safety of people returning to work when the covid-19 lockdown measures are eased.

Mims Davies:

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) was involved in cross-government work, Safer Workplaces, coordinated by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), to produce guidance on the safety measures businesses will need to adopt as they reopen. The guidance was published on 11 May 2020 and can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-guidance-launched-to-help-get-brits-safely-back-to-work>.

The guidance covers who should be at work and contains practical steps to achieve social distancing and hygiene in the workplace. HSE produced a straightforward guide to assessing the risks from COVID-19 in the workplace, to aid businesses to use the BEIS guidance in their own workplaces.

■ **Personal Independence Payment****Vicky Foxcroft:****[43070]**

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what data her Department holds on the average processing time for new personal independence payment claims for each month from April 2019 to April 2020 in (a) Lewisham Deptford, (b) London and (c) the UK.

Justin Tomlinson:

Data on the average processing time (Average Actual Clearance Time) for new Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claims for each month from April 2019 to January 2020 (the latest available data) in Great Britain and broken down by region (including London) is included in the Data Tables:

“ [Data tables: PIP award rates, clearance/outstanding times, and tracking of initial decisions following a PIP assessment through to Mandatory Reconsiderations or Appeals, to January 2020 \(XLS\)](#) ” which are published here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/personal-independence-payment-april-2013-to-january-2020>

Data for Lewisham Deptford is presented in the table below.

Table: PIP Average Actual Clearance Times (Median number of weeks) from registration to DWP decision for New Claims (Normal Rules) for Lewisham Deptford, April 2019 to January 2020.

MONTH	MEDIAN NUMBER OF WEEKS
Apr-19	17
May-19	-
Jun-19	17
Jul-19	-
Aug-19	20

MONTH	MEDIAN NUMBER OF WEEKS
Sep-19	14
Oct-19	15
Nov-19	18
Dec-19	-
Jan-20	20

Source: PIP Computer System claimant records.

Notes:

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number of weeks.
2. The status of claims as 'normal rules' and 'new claim' is shown as at the point of the DWP decision, in accordance with the measure. It is possible for claims to transition between normal/special rules and new claims/reassessments during the course of the claimant journey.
3. The figures in the table are the average clearance time of claims cleared within that calendar month.
4. The median time is the middle value if you were to order all the times within the distribution from lowest value to highest value. The median is presented here instead of the mean because the mean can be unduly affected by outlying cases (e.g. cases where the person has been hard to reach due to being in prison, hospital, failed to attend the assessment on numerous occasions etc.)
5. The 'Registration to DWP decision' clearance time is measured as the average time between the date of registration of the claim and the date of the DWP decision to either award or disallow the claim. It does not include claims that were withdrawn by the claimant or claims that were disallowed by DWP pre-referral to the Assessment Providers (e.g. for failure to meet basic eligibility criteria or failure to return the Part 2 form within the time limit).
6. '-' Fewer than 50 claims in this category.

The information requested for February to April 2020 is not yet readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost. It is due for future publication in the PIP Quarterly Official Statistics which will be released on 11 June 2020.

Vicky Foxcroft:

[43071]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many new personal independence payment claims were accepted (a) with and (b) without a telephone assessment in each week since 1 March 2020.

Justin Tomlinson:

The information requested is not readily available and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

■ Social Security Benefits**Kate Osamor:**[\[43082\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 27 April 2020 to Question 37988 on Social Security Benefits, if she will make it her Department's policy to write to all those claimants who have undergone an assessment for (a) employment support allowance and (b) personal independence payment to (i) notify those claimants of that consultation and (ii) seek the views of those claimants on those green paper proposals.

Justin Tomlinson:

We are committed to ensuring that the Health and Disability Green Paper addresses the right challenges and issues in the welfare system and that action is influenced strongly by our stakeholders and people who use our services.

To achieve this, it is important that we get a wide range of views from the many users of our services, once the Green Paper is published. We are actively considering the best ways to do this. The suggestion made, however, is not an option we are currently considering due to the resource requirement involved, which may prove disproportionate, and that many people may not welcome such an approach.

During the Green Paper consultation period, we would welcome responses on how to improve the system from anyone with experience of DWP services. Details of how to respond will be set out when published.

Kate Osamor:[\[43084\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 27 April 2020 to Question 37990 on Social Security Benefits, how many mandatory reconsiderations of (a) employment support allowance, (b) personal independence payment and (c) universal credit decisions her Department completed in (i) March 2020 and (ii) April 2020.

Justin Tomlinson:

Statistics on Mandatory Reconsideration (MR) clearances for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) Work Capability Assessments (WCA) covering the period up to April 2020 have been pre-announced for publication on 11th June 2020.

Information on the number of completed Universal Credit MRs is provided in the table below.

MONTH	NUMBER OF COMPLETED UC MRS
March 2020	16,270
April 2020	7,510

This information is for Great Britain and is rounded to the nearest 10.

■ **Universal Credit**

Stephen Timms: [\[14942\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many universal credit claimants have had their payments reduced as a result of deductions for court fines in each of the last five years.

Stephen Timms: [\[14943\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many and what proportion of universal credit claimants with deductions due to court fines have had the maximum deduction taken from their allowance in each of the last five years.

Will Quince:

[Holding answer 24 February 2020]: We are unable to provide figures for court fine deductions over the last five years as improvements to third party data reporting commenced in November 2018. Information which is available can be found in the table below.

The Department's deductions policy strikes a fair balance between a claimant's need to meet their financial obligations and their ability to ensure they can meet their day-to-day needs. It maintains our policy to enforce social obligations such as the payment of court fines, ensure Government debt is recovered and vitally to safeguard claimants from the potential impacts of not repaying priority debts, such as homelessness or loss of utilities. Since October 2019, Universal Credit deductions are a maximum of 30% of a claimant's standard allowance down from 40% previously. The Budget 2020 also set out that the maximum level will be further reduced, so that standard deductions will not exceed 25% of a claimant's Standard Allowance from October 2021.

PAYMENT MONTH	NUMBER OF CLAIMANTS WITH DEDUCTION FOR COURT FINES	% OF CLAIMANTS WITH DEDUCTIONS FOR COURT FINES	NUMBER OF CLAIMANTS WITH THE MAXIMUM DEDUCTION FOR COURT FINES (£108.35)	PERCENTAGE OF THOSE WITH DEDUCTIONS FOR COURT FINES WHO HAVE THE MAXIMUM DEDUCTION (£108.35)
November 2018	7,000	0.62%	Less than 500	6%
December 2018	7,000	0.59%	Less than 500	6%
January 2019	8,000	0.56%	Less than 500	5%
February 2019	8,000	0.56%	Less than 500	5%
March 2019	13,000	0.84%	1,000	5%
April 2019	37,000	2.23%	2,000	7%
May 2019	61,000	3.49%	4,000	7%
June 2019	83,000	4.51%	5,000	7%
July 2019	102,000	5.28%	7,000	7%
August 2019	112,000	5.57%	9,000	8%
September 2019	117,000	5.59%	13,000	11%
October 2019	114,000	5.22%	9,000	8%
November 2019	109,000	4.82%	2,000	2%

Notes:

1. Figures rounded to the nearest 1,000
2. The increase in the proportion of claimants with deductions for fines is due to an improved manual process phased in between February and the end of March for courts to send through their court deductions.
3. Figures are subject to retrospective change as later data becomes available
4. Claim numbers may not match official statistics caseloads due to small methodological differences.
5. Court fines are first taken at a 5% fixed rate, then again at the end of the priority order up to the maximum deductions limit, up to a maximum deduction of £108.35. Figures show the number of people having court fine deductions at £108.35 per month.

6. The decrease in proportion of claimants with deductions for fines from October 2019 is because the maximum deductions limit was reduced from 40% of the standard allowance to 30% of the standard allowance.

7. The decrease in proportion of claimants with the maximum deduction for fines from October 2019 is because the maximum deductions limit was reduced from 40% of the standard allowance to 30% of the standard allowance

■ Universal Credit: Advertising

Kate Osamor:

[43081]

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the Answer of 1 May 2020 to Questions 38941 and 38942 on Department for Work and Pensions: Metro Newspaper, if she will place in the Library a copy of the Government Communications Service's review into the actions taken by her Department throughout the Government's Universal Credit Uncovered advertisement campaign.

Will Quince:

We will place a copy in the Library of the review of the Department for Work and Pensions Universal Credit Uncovered Metro partnership (May 2019) conducted by the Government Communication Service.

The review concluded the Department did not intentionally mislead the public. The Department has provided assurance to the ASA that the advertising which was the subject of their investigation will no longer appear in its original form. We continue to recognise the importance of working closely with the ASA to inform future campaigns and establish best practice.

Within the recent context of unprecedented volumes of benefit claims, it continues to be very much in the public interest to ensure people understand how best to claim Universal Credit and we will continue to ensure the Department meets our responsibility to do this.

MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

HOME OFFICE

■ Migrant Workers: NHS

Fleur Anderson:

[\[44051\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if she will grant indefinite leave to remain for all foreign nationals working in the NHS.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 12 May 2020. The correct answer should have been:

Kevin Foster:

The Government has announced we will extend the visas for a range of healthcare professionals working for the NHS and independent health and care providers, where their current visa expires before 1 October. This offer also applies to their families. The 12-month extension is automatic and free of charge and those benefitting will not have to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge.

The Home Secretary has confirmed we will grant immediate Indefinite Leave to Remain to families of eligible NHS health workers who die as a result of contracting Coronavirus.

The Government has announced we will extend the visas for a range of healthcare professionals working for the NHS and independent health and care providers, where their current visa expires before 1 October. This offer also applies to their families. The 12-month extension is automatic and free of charge and those benefitting will not have to pay the Immigration Health Surcharge.

The Home Secretary has confirmed families and dependants of the health workers applicable for this automatic visa extension, who sadly pass away due to contracting the Covid-19 virus, will be offered immediate Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK, without a requirement to pay a fee.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ BAE Systems: Inspections

Lloyd Russell-Moyle:

[\[43126\]](#)

To ask the Secretary of State for International Trade, when her Department last used its powers under Article 31 of the Export Control Order 2008 to undertake an ad hoc inspection of BAE System's weekly freighter flight from Warton Aerodrome in Lancashire to Ta'if in Saudi Arabia; and what the outcome was of that inspection.

An error has been identified in the written answer given on 11 May 2020. The correct answer should have been:

Mr Ranil Jayawardena:

Inspections of records under section 31 are in relation to a company's use of general licences and not specific events such as regular freighter flights.

Their purpose is to get assurance that users of general licences meet the terms and conditions of their licences.

The frequency of inspections varies from six months to three years, taking into account the track record of compliance; types of licences utilised; knowledge and experience of the business in relation to export controls; and frequency of usage.

The BAE site at Warton was last inspected on 5 and 6 April 2017 and covered three separate BAE Systems companies. The outcome of compliance inspections is commercially sensitive.

Inspections of records under section 31 are in relation to a company's use of general licences, rather than specific events such as regular freighter flights.

The purpose of inspections is to get assurance that users of general licences meet the terms and conditions of their licences. The frequency of inspections varies from six months to three years, taking into account the track record of compliance; types of licences utilised; knowledge and experience of the business in relation to export controls; and frequency of usage.

The BAE site at Warton was last inspected on 5th and 6th April 2017 and covered three separate BAE Systems companies. The outcome of compliance inspections is commercially sensitive.

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

■ Business Update

Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Alok Sharma): **[[HCWS232](#)]**

I am tabling this statement for the benefit of Honourable and Right Honourable Members to bring to their attention the changes we have made to the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme and the Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme so that more businesses can access the finance they need.

The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme was launched on 23 March and is facilitated by the Government-owned British Business Bank and delivered through its delivery partners. Lenders offer loans of up to £5 million to support small and medium sized businesses with a turnover up to £45 million that are affected by the coronavirus outbreak.

The Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan Scheme was launched on 20 April. Lenders can offer loans of up to £50 million to support viable businesses with a turnover of £45 million and above that are affected by the coronavirus outbreak.

On 3 April we announced changes to the CBILS scheme. The first change was to the use of personal guarantees under the scheme. Since the launch of CBILS, lenders had been permitted, but not obliged, to require a personal guarantee from businesses for loans of any size provided through CBILS. Lenders were never and will never be permitted under any circumstances to use business directors' or their families' principal residence as security. We made changes to the use of personal guarantees through the scheme to provide further reassurance regarding personal assets during this difficult time.

The largest CBILS lenders had already confirmed, on a voluntary basis, that they would not require personal guarantees for CBILS loans under £250,000. The changes we made to the terms of the scheme mean that **no lender will be permitted** to require a personal guarantee for loans or other CBILS facilities under £250,000.

For CBILS loans over £250,000, lenders are still permitted to require a personal guarantee, although under no circumstances may they use primary personal residences for this. Upon launch, in the event of a default, lenders were previously expected to seek to recover the loss from business assets and then using any personal guarantees. Only when these had been exhausted were they permitted to claim the residual loss under the guarantee agreement. We made changes to these terms so that lenders **may now only look to the personal guarantee for a maximum of 20 per cent of the remaining debt** before claiming 80 per cent of the residual loss under the guarantee agreement.

The second change concerned the requirements businesses had to meet to access CBILS. At launch, CBILS was designed to support SMEs unable to secure finance on commercial terms. Because CBILS was only available to companies that could not

otherwise secure a debt facility, it meant that preferable terms, such as the government's coverage of initial interest payments, were unavailable to those businesses that were able to secure facilities on commercial terms.

We therefore removed this requirement, meaning CBILS can now support lending to smaller businesses even where they could have secured a loan on commercial terms. This means that in addition to meeting company size and sectoral restrictions, the only other requirement for businesses is to be able to demonstrate they have been adversely affected by Covid-19 and for lenders to judge that the business is viable. This means that more businesses affected by the outbreak will be able to benefit from a CBILS facility and the government's 12-month Business Interruption Payment and resulting lower initial repayments.

On 27 April, we announced further changes to the scheme. **The cap on gross Government liability at the level of the lender's whole CBILS portfolio has now been removed.** Previously the Government's gross liability was capped at 75 per cent of losses across the lender's whole CBILS portfolio. Removing the portfolio cap therefore gives lenders an 80 per cent guarantee across all CBILS lending. This change should provide further confidence to lenders to support the timely supply of finance to businesses.

We are also removing the 'forward looking' element of the viability test. The current economic uncertainty means that many businesses are having difficulties providing cashflow forecasts, which is slowing down some lending decisions. Allowing lenders to base lending decisions purely on an assessment of business liability pre Covid-19 removes the requirement for lenders to ask for evidence of future cashflow, thereby speeding up lending decisions.

Finally, **charities and Further Education colleges need no longer show that at least 50 per cent of their income comes from trading to be eligible for both CBILS and CLBILS loans.** In practice, this requirement precluded a large number of organisations in these sectors from accessing support through these schemes, and its removal will support these organisations to access both schemes.

The removal of the portfolio cap increases the statutory contingent liability of the CBILS scheme, and I will be laying an updated Departmental Minute today containing a description of that revised liability undertaken. The other changes do not impact the statutory contingent liability of the CBILS scheme.

The removal of the requirement for at least 50 per cent of the income of charities and Further Education colleges to come from trading to be eligible for CLBILS also does not impact the statutory contingent liability of the CLBILS scheme.

For more information on this and other support for business, please go to

<https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/>

EDUCATION

■ Education and childcare settings update

The Secretary of State for Education (Gavin Williamson):

[[HCWS236](#)]

This week I have published guidance to set out how we will support early years, schools and colleges to welcome back more children from 1 June at the earliest.

It is over seven weeks since we asked schools, colleges, and childcare settings to allow only vulnerable children and those of critical workers to attend, and I encourage them to continue to take up this offer. This has been a huge ask of teachers, parents and children. I am immensely grateful for the response of all those working in education, childcare and children's social care who have undoubtedly helped to support the NHS and save lives.

But we all know the best place for children to be educated is in school and it was always my intention to get them back there as soon as the scientific advice allowed.

As the Prime Minister has confirmed, we are now past the peak of the virus and he has set out a roadmap for the next phases of our recovery. If progress continues to be made we expect that, from 1 June at the earliest, we will be able to begin a phased return to school, college and childcare for children and young people in key transition years, alongside the priority groups currently eligible to attend:

- Primary schools in England will be able to welcome back nursery, reception, Year 1 and Year 6 children, in smaller class sizes.
- Nurseries and other early years providers, including childminders, will be able to begin welcoming back children of all ages.
- Secondary schools and colleges will be able to provide some face-to-face support for Year 10, Year 12, and 16-19 college students who are due to take key exams and assessments next year.

I have published the following guidance to support education and childcare settings to prepare for these changes on [Gov.uk](#).

- Actions for educational and childcare settings
- Implementing protective measures in education childcare settings
- Information for parents and carers
- Initial planning framework

This guidance sets out protective measures that settings should put in place to reduce the risk of transmission. These include children and young people staying within their new, smaller, classes wherever possible and limiting contact between different groups. We have also set out a range of additional protective measures including frequent cleaning, encouraging good hand and respiratory hygiene, considering refreshing the timetable to limit movement and stagger break and lunchtimes, and using outdoor space.

Staff and pupils in all settings will be eligible for testing if they become ill with coronavirus symptoms, as will members of their households, to enable a track and trace approach to be taken in response to any confirmed cases.

We continue to follow the best medical and scientific advice and believe that this phased return is the most sensible course of action to take. We will only do this provided that the five key tests set by Government justify the changes at the time

We will also be updating our guidance for early years settings to confirm that paid childcare can be provided to the children of one household from today, Wednesday 13 May, including by childminders, who may choose to look after the children of one household if they are not already looking after vulnerable children or those of critical workers.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

■ Construction update

Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): [\[HCWS234\]](#)

Our Plan to Rebuild: the UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy published by the Government on Monday 11 May makes clear that construction work can be undertaken across England providing sites are able to operate safely in line with the new COVID-19 Secure guidelines. A number of developers have already announced plans to restart work on sites.

In doing so, the Government recognises that the construction industry needs to be able to adapt its normal practices. As part of this, temporary extensions to working hours may be required on some sites to facilitate safe working and allow tasks to be completed where social distancing can be challenging. Longer working hours may also be needed to facilitate social distancing in the wider community, for instance by reducing pressure on public transport. It might be necessary to start work earlier in the day or work until later in the evenings.

However, many construction sites in England are subject to controls which restrict their hours of operation. These controls include planning conditions, which might directly restrict working hours or which might restrict working hours through a construction management plan. These conditions may be necessary, for example, to make the development acceptable to local residents and businesses who might otherwise suffer from traffic, noise and other local amenity issues.

The purpose of this Written Ministerial Statement is to make clear that, with immediate effect, local planning authorities should take a swift and positive approach to requests from developers and site operators for greater flexibility around construction site working hours. This is to ensure that, where appropriate, planning conditions are not a barrier to allowing developers the flexibility necessary to facilitate the safe operation of construction sites during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to proceed at pace with work otherwise delayed as a result of COVID-19.

The National Planning Policy Framework already emphasises that planning enforcement is a discretionary activity and local planning authorities should act proportionately in responding to suspected breaches of planning control.

Where only a short term or modest increase to working hours is required, local planning authorities should, having regard to the reason for the condition and to their legal obligations, not seek to undertake enforcement action.

Where developers require longer term or more significant changes to working hours, they should apply to the local planning authority to temporarily amend a condition or a construction management plan in the usual way. In doing so, it will be important for applicants to consider potential impacts and, where necessary, to put forward brief plans to manage concerns, drawing on existing good practice. In return, local planning authorities should respond speedily and sympathetically and engage positively with applicants to find solutions. Local authorities should prioritise these types of applications and give early clarity on the acceptability of extended hours to developers. They should ensure that decisions are issued quickly – with the aim of doing so within 10 working days.

In allowing greater flexibility, the Government recognises the need to mitigate the impact that any temporary relaxation of working hours could have on local residents and businesses. Requests to extend working hours should be proportionate and should not involve working on Sundays or bank holidays.

However, local authorities should not refuse requests to extend working hours until 9pm, Monday to Saturday without very compelling reasons for rejection. In some cases, such as in areas without residential properties, extending working hours beyond this, including allowing 24 hour working where appropriate, may be justified. In all cases, sympathetic site management should be demonstrated to mitigate local impacts and local authorities should show best endeavours to facilitate such requests.

Applications should only be refused where there are very compelling reasons such as significant impact on neighbouring businesses or uses which are particularly sensitive to noise, dust or vibration, which cannot be overcome through other mitigation, or where impacts on densely populated areas would be unreasonable.

Any temporary changes to construction working hours conditions granted by local planning authorities should not extend beyond 13 May 2021.

This Statement covers England only. The need for the Statement will be reviewed when the requirement for social distancing on construction sites diminishes.

■ Planning update

Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Robert Jenrick): [\[HCWS235\]](#)

Virtual working and planning – Responding to Covid – 19 Restrictions

Introduction

The planning system has a vital role to play in enabling the delivery of housing and economic growth that will support the UK's economic recovery. It is important that the system continues to operate effectively, ensuring that all those involved, including local authorities, the Planning Inspectorate, developers, statutory consultees, local communities and others can engage in the process while adhering to the Government's guidance on social distancing.

This Statement sets out the Government's expectations for how the planning system should be operating during the COVID-19 emergency. It applies to applications and appeals under the Town and Country Planning Act; Development Consent Orders under the Planning Act 2008; the Compulsory Purchase Order regime and to development plans, including neighbourhood plans and spatial development strategies.

The role of digital

Local planning authorities and the Planning Inspectorate drive the planning process forward and should ensure that it continues to operate effectively to support economic recovery. Moving to digital events and processes will be critical. This means adapting to working virtually, including virtual hearings and events (such as using video-conferencing and/or telephone) and making documents available for inspection online. The Government expects everyone involved in the planning process to engage proactively.

The Government considers that the current legislative framework allows for virtual hearings. It is confident that processes can be put in place in the vast majority of cases to allow for the participation of all parties. The Government recognises that the method by which hearings and events are conducted is a matter for the Inspectorate, operating in accordance with their legal obligations, and it expects these arrangements to be made as the default method of operation in the vast majority of cases. The Government recognises that in exceptional circumstances it may not be fair to proceed virtually and that alternative arrangements may be needed. These alternative arrangements should be taken forward speedily, where possible, taking into account the Government's guidance on social distancing.

The Government expects opportunities for virtual hearings and processes to be maximised. It will draw from current and emerging practice to inform policy and process in the longer term.

Virtual events

The Government fully supports the Planning Inspectorate's programme for moving to digital inquiries, hearings, meetings and other events. Digital events present opportunities to increase participation in planning processes which are important for local communities

and will minimise the impacts of delays to planning decisions which might otherwise occur due to the requirements for social distancing.

The Inspectorate conducted the first digital hearing event on 11 May and will be quickly scaling up in relation to further virtual events during May and early June where this is consistent with fair participation. In doing so it will accommodate essential legal and procedural requirements. The Government expects events to be taking place virtually by mid-June, other than in exceptional circumstances.

The Government expects Inspectors and Examining Authorities to take decisions about whether and how virtual events should proceed and to consider the practical measures needed to ensure fair participation.

The Courts have led in demonstrating the successful use of technology to continue their work. Recognising that the use of technology to support virtual planning events may be challenging, the Government expects that appropriate measures are put in place by the Inspectorate to test the technology and ensure that it enables fair participation. It also expects the Inspectorate to identify those more exceptional circumstances where a virtual event may not be appropriate, making decisions about how to proceed based on the facts of each particular case.

Digital documentation

The effects of COVID-19 mean that it is not always possible to access public buildings. As a result, access to planning documents by making them physically available for inspection at local libraries, council offices etc, is now not available. During these exceptional circumstances, the Government considers that online inspection of documents should be the default position across all planning regimes, and it is actively exploring all options to achieve this.

The Government recognises there are sections of the community with limited or no access to the internet and authorities and developers should take reasonable steps to ensure those without access are involved and consider alternative and creative ways to achieve this where possible. This could for example, include sending out documents by CD or USB stick where this meets the needs of those requesting such documents.

As restrictions are eased, planning authorities and others should integrate the range of methods that are available to them into their approaches to ensure all sections of the community are reached as thoroughly as is practically possible.

Site Visits

Site visits, whether conducted by local authorities, planning inspectors or statutory consultees, are an important part of the process of considering development proposals and plans. Where site visits are required or necessary, they should be undertaken in line with the Government's guidance on social distancing and safety requirements. .

The Planning Inspectorate will be restarting site visits from mid-May. The Government supports the Inspectorate's determination to facilitate site visits. It will expect Inspectors to use their judgement in deciding if a site visit is necessary or whether alternative approaches are acceptable, taking account of the particular circumstances.

Publicity and community engagement

The Government will introduce from tomorrow temporary regulations to supplement the existing statutory publicity arrangements for planning applications, listed building consent applications and environmental statements for EIA development.

Local planning authorities (and applicants of EIA development under the TCPA) now have the flexibility to take other reasonable steps to publicise applications if they cannot discharge the specific requirements for site notices, neighbour notifications or newspaper publicity. These steps will notify people who are likely to have an interest in the application and indicate where further information about it can be viewed online. These steps can include the use of social media and other electronic communications and must be proportionate to the scale and nature of the proposed development.

Guidance to accompany these regulations will also be published to highlight what alternative publicity local planning authorities could undertake. In particular, if local newspapers are not circulating in their area, authorities should seek to use local online news portals in the first instance.

In relation to development plans, the Government has issued additional planning guidance on reviewing and updating Statements of Community Involvement and Neighbourhood Planning to support authorities and neighbourhood planning groups in engaging with their communities on their plans at this time

Guidance and Advice

The Planning Inspectorate has published and regularly updates guidance on its work during the COVID-19 social distancing measures, which can be viewed here (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-planning-inspectorate-guidance>) .

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

■ **The UK's approach to Negotiations with Japan**

Secretary of State for Department of International Trade (Elizabeth Truss):
[\[HCWS231\]](#)

Coronavirus is the biggest threat this country has faced in decades. The Government is doing all it can to protect business from the worst effects of coronavirus in the immediate term. We must take steps to support our economy, reduce impacts and provide opportunities for the future economic recovery.

More trade is essential if the UK is to overcome the unprecedented economic challenge posed by coronavirus. It can give us security at home and opportunities abroad – opening new markets for business, bringing investment, better jobs, higher wages and lower prices just as we need them most. At a time when protectionist barriers are on the rise, all countries need to work together to ensure long-term prosperity and international trade is central to this cooperation.

That is why we will use our voice as a new independent trading nation to champion free trade, fight protectionism and remove barriers at every opportunity. The Government's ambition is to secure free trade agreements (FTAs) with countries covering 80% of UK trade within the next three years, to become a truly Global Britain.

An enhanced FTA with Japan, the 3rd largest economy in the world in 2018, represents significant opportunities throughout the economy, from agriculture to digital. It will also help us increase the resilience of our supply chains and the security of our whole economy as we diversify our trade.

A deal with Japan will be a driving force to maximise the UK's advantage in the opportunities Asia Pacific affords. These bilateral negotiations are a logical first step to joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), given that Japan is CPTPP's largest economy.

Japan is a developed economy with high standards and we are major investors in each other's economies. Trade with Japan is integral to UK jobs and businesses. In 2018, around 9,500 VAT registered businesses exported £6bn worth of goods to Japan, employing 2.4 million people. Around 6,700 VAT registered business, employing 2.5 million people, imported £10bn worth of goods from Japan.

An enhanced FTA with Japan is therefore expected to deliver a significant and sustained long term boost to every region in the UK. Our analysis shows that in the long run, the UK economy could benefit from a £1.5 billion boost, as the trade deal could increase trade flows between both countries by £15.2 billion. UK workers' wages could increase by £800 million in the long run as a result of the deal.

Total annual tariff reductions on goods imports from Japan could be worth up to around £275 million per year in the long run. Some 59% of all Japanese goods imported into the UK and 44% of all UK goods exported into Japan are used in supply chains (average 2016-2018). So as well as reducing the price of consumer goods, lower tariffs could also cut the costs of domestic production in both countries.

Removing trade barriers with Japan could deliver huge gains, both for the 8,000 UK Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) across the UK already exporting goods with Japan as well as those making plans to enter the Japanese market. For example, total annual tariff reductions on goods exports to Japan could be worth around £33 million per year in the long run.

The deal will also provide cutting edge provisions on digital trade that maximise opportunities for trade across all sectors of the economy, providing trust and stability for UK businesses, entrepreneurs and exporters. Such provisions will reduce trade barriers and make it easier for the SMEs already exporting goods to Japan. UK businesses will have the opportunity to lead on innovation, supporting the development of important emerging technologies, such as quantum computing. E-commerce and the creative industries will also benefit from the free flow of data and strong copyright provisions.

That is why today, the Department for International Trade is publishing a comprehensive document setting out the UK's strategic approach to an enhanced FTA between the UK

and Japan. We will be placing copies in the House libraries. The document is set out in three parts:

- The Government's negotiating objectives for an enhanced FTA with Japan, using the existing EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement as a basis.
- The Government response to the Call for Input on trade negotiations with Japan, providing an overview of the responses received and setting out how these have fed into our policy development.
- A Scoping Assessment providing a preliminary assessment of the potential long-term economic impacts of an enhanced FTA between the UK and Japan.

The objectives published today are informed by our Call for Input, which ran for six weeks between 20 September and 4 November 2019 and gave businesses, interest groups and members of the public the opportunity to highlight their priorities for a potential future agreement with Japan.

A deal with Japan will help us to deliver opportunity and unleash the potential of every part of our United Kingdom. Analysis in the Scoping Assessment shows a UK-Japan enhanced FTA could have a positive impact on every UK nation and region in the long run, with Scotland, the East Midlands and London expected to benefit the most.

We are engaging with the devolved administrations, crown dependencies and overseas territories to ensure that we develop an enhanced FTA that works for the whole of the UK.

Our negotiating objectives clearly set out our priorities for an ambitious and comprehensive agreement, which will build on our existing EPA to strengthen the economic relationship with one of our largest bilateral trading partners.

The Government is committed to transparency and we will continue to ensure that parliamentarians, UK citizens and businesses have access to the information they need on our trade negotiations.

TRANSPORT

■ Transport Update

Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps):

[[HCWS233](#)]

This statement concerns the Development Consent Order application for the M25 Junction 10/A3 Wisley Interchange Improvement made by Highways England under the Planning Act 2008, which had been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate on 19 June 2019.

Under section 98(1) of the Act the Examining Authority appointed to examine the application must complete its examination within six months. Under section 98(4) the Examining Authority must submit its recommendation report to the Secretary of State within three months of its completion of the examination. Under section 107(1) of the Act,

following receipt of the Examining Authority's recommendation report, the Secretary of State must decide whether to grant development consent within three months.

Sections 98(4) and 107(3) of the Act give the relevant Secretary of State power to set new deadlines in respect of the above which are later than the statutory maxima. For this application, the relevant Secretary of State is the Secretary of State for Transport. In exercising this power, the Secretary of State for Transport must, amongst other things, make a statement to Parliament announcing the new deadlines.

The examination for the M25 Junction 10 DCO began on 12 November 2019 and is due to close on 12 May 2020. The recommendation report would need to be sent to the Secretary of State on or before 12 August 2020. A decision in this case would therefore be made on or before 12 November 2020.

The deadline for the completion of the examination is to be extended to 12 July 2020 (an extension of two months) to enable examination hearings postponed in the light of Government advice concerning coronavirus (COVID-19) to be rescheduled and held in a virtual forum. Consequently, the deadline for the Examining Authority to submit its recommendation report to the Secretary of State for Transport is amended to 12 October 2020 and the deadline for the Secretary of State for Transport to take his decision is amended to 12 January 2021.

The decision to extend the examination under the Planning Act 2008 regime is not taken lightly and reflects the exceptional public health circumstances the country finds itself in.

The decision to set new deadlines is without prejudice to the decision on whether to grant development consent.

TREASURY

■ Exemption for coronavirus related reimbursed home office expenses

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman):

[[HCWS237](#)]

To support employees who are working from home and need to purchase home office equipment as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, a temporary tax exemption and National Insurance disregard will come into effect to ensure that the expense will not attract tax and NICs liabilities where reimbursed by the employer. The expenditure must meet the following two conditions to be eligible for relief:

That equipment is obtained for the sole purpose of enabling the employee to work from home as a result of the coronavirus outbreak, and

The provision of the equipment would have been exempt from income tax if it had been provided directly to the employee by or on behalf of the employer (under section 316 of ITEPA).

The exemption is a temporary measure and will have effect from the day after the regulations come into force until the end of the tax year 2020/21.

HMRC will exercise its collection and management discretion and will not collect tax and NICs due on any reimbursed payments made from 16 March 2020 (the date the government recommended working from home) to the date these regulations take effect.

This measure is being announced outside the normal fiscal process in order to ensure that employers and employees are able effectively to manage their working from home arrangements as soon as possible.

The Government will lay the statutory instruments to update these charges before the House in due course. A tax information and impact note (TIIN) will be published at www.gov.uk/government/collections/tax-information-and-impact-notes-tiins.

This statement has also been made in the House of Lords: HLWS234